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CALLED TO MISSION
Mennonite Women Missionaries in Central
Africa in the Second Half of the Twentieth
Century

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Abstract of the Thesis:

This thesis is an investigation of the “sense of call” as a potential support factor for Mennonite women missionaries from North America based in Central Africa during the latter half of the twentieth century. The investigation is conducted in two main parts. In the first we investigate the theological-historical distinctives of the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition; in the second part, through a case study, we examine how a select number of women missionaries interpreted their call in relation to their heritage, how their sense of call functioned as a support factor or otherwise, and whether this was determined in any significant way by the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition. Central to the study is a pastoral concern for women missionaries as women whose missionary role has placed special burdens on them in situations of cultural dislocation.

INTRODUCTION

Perspectives and Field of the Study

My Original Position

Traditionally it has been assumed that those who enter foreign missionary service do so because of a sense of having been divinely called. As missionaries put this sense of call into practice they usually encounter formidable difficulties. LeRoy Johnston, Jr., a US psychologist concerned with missionary care provides a sample list of 'tangible and visible' challenges a missionary may have to face:

The selection process, and psychological screening, education preparation and educational needs, women in ministry, single missionary concerns, male and female, national church leadership concerns, short-term versus the career person, language learning and study, political and social unrest, health and physical needs, MK¹ education and opportunities, care for older family members in home country, spiritual nurture and growth, multinational team relationships, financial support concerns and concepts, administrative organisation and design, dealing with social injustices reentry problems for the family, pluralism of mission groups, vocational change and redirection.²

Johnston then proposes a model for coping with the above 'tangible and visible' concerns. These he calls secondary issues, many of which are related to the missionaries' cultural re-location in a foreign environment. As we will later see, these re-location issues also include the challenge of what is often termed 'reverse culture shock,' which the missionaries face as they move back home either when on furlough or at the end of their missionary service. But this is, for the moment, another matter.

According to Johnston's model the key factor, or the primary factor as he calls it, in dealing with such missionary challenges is the missionary's underlying faith perspective. This he divides into the following five core components:

Obeying God's call, persevering with God, trusting in God, maintaining God's perspective, growing through testing.³

About the correlation between the primary and the secondary factors he maintains:

¹ Abbreviation for 'Missionary Kids' (footnote mine)

² JOHNSTON LeRoy, Jr, 'Core Issues in Missionary Life,' in *Missionary Care, Counting the Cost of World Evangelisation*, Kelly O'Donnell, (ed.), William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, third ed. 1999, p.40

³ Ibid. pp.40-44

The missionary's relationship with God is the preeminent issue. It is important to be aware of the numerous challenges of missionary life and to make sure that missionaries are supported as they face these. But ultimately, these are secondary issues, which must be understood in light of the missionary's need for obedience, perseverance, trust, perspective, and testing.⁴

A global study conducted at the end of the 20th century by the *World Evangelical Fellowship Mission Commission (WEF/MC)*⁵ on mission attrition, *ReMAP* (Reducing Missionary Attrition Project)⁶ came to a similar conclusion. It indicates that a significant link exists between the missionaries' sense of divine calling and their ability to avoid a premature return from mission service. In the study the vast majority of mission agencies surveyed viewed a 'clear calling to mission work from God' as 'the most important reason for preventing loss of career missionaries.'⁷

Although one might disagree with particular details of the above two analyses, they do highlight certain phenomena to which I had been alerted independently, based on my personal life experience. Firstly, as an ordained minister married to an ordained minister and with many minister friends and colleagues I had long been vaguely aware of the importance of a sense of a divine calling for the clergy. Secondly, over time I had become sensitised to the high prevalence of burn out among clergy who felt divinely called to full time ministry and to the profound effects such burn outs can have on them and on their personal and professional environment. Over time I began to wonder about a possible correlation between a sense of calling and the phenomenon of attrition among those who felt called by God to serve him in full time ministry. Various events eventually culminated in me deciding to investigate such a potential correlation in the form of a PhD thesis.

In doing so I started out with the initial theory that

⁴ Ibid. p.44

⁵ Renamed *World Evangelical Alliance* in 2001.

⁶ The findings of the study are recorded and discussed in *Too Valuable to Lose, Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition*, William D. Taylor, (ed.), William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1997. The study is based on missionaries and mission agencies from 14 nations. They include among the 'newer' sending countries Brazil, Nigeria, Korea, the Philippines, India, a representative from Spanish Latin America, Costa Rica, Ghana and Singapore, and among the 'older' sending countries the UK, Australia, Germany, Denmark, the USA and Canada.

⁷ BRIERLEY, Peter W. 'Mission Attrition: The ReMAP Research Report, in *Too Valuable to Lose, Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition*, p.99. Other important 'positive' factors listed were in order of priority, a supportive family 74%; a healthy spirituality 70%; cultural adaptation 65%; good relationships 54%; pastoral care 49% and financial provision 47%.

... a clear sense of call was likely to act as a significant support factor for those who felt called in their cultural re-location experience.

This theory was *i.a.* informed by the prominent 20th century Swiss medical doctor and psychologist,⁸ Paul Tournier, who claimed that

... to receive a mandate, to be invested with a function is always a powerful support to a person. How much more so when we are conscious that the mandate comes from God.⁹

This claim provided an initial point of departure for my research and a succinct summary of what I planned to demonstrate.

My Field of Study

The selected group of people on whom I decided to test this theory eventually turned out to be Mennonite women missionaries in Africa. Specifically, the study is based on North American female missionaries, both single and married, who spent at least part of their service under the auspices of *Africa Inter Mennonite Mission (AIMM)*, or its predecessor *The Congo Inland Mission (CIM)*. *CIM/AIMM* was/is a traditional mission organisation insofar as its core activities consist of conventional missionary concerns such as preaching, church planting, and Bible translation. Within this framework the women served as full-time or part-time missionary doctors, teachers, bookkeepers, etc, the mission agency's policy being that no woman should enter missions simply as a 'missionary wife.'

With few exceptions the missionaries were all born and bred Mennonites, the exceptions consisting mainly of women from other denominations such as Lutheran or Methodist, who had joined the Mennonite denomination by marriage.

The overall *time frame* of mission service covered by the study is the second half of the twentieth century, while the study's geographical parameters are determined by the Africa presence of *CIM/AIMM*. The mission was originally constituted in 1911 by members of the *Central Conference of Mennonites* (formerly known as Stucky Amish) and the *Defenseless Mennonite Church* (formerly the Egly Amish), in Meadows, Illinois. It was first called *United Mennonite Board* before being re-named *Congo Inland Mission* in 1912. While *CIM* restricted its mission activities to what was then known as the Belgian Congo (Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo), its direct successor *AIMM* gradually broadened its presence to include

⁸ Tournier was a self-taught psychologist, having originally qualified as a medical doctor. This unorthodox background gave him a certain originality in his approach to the field of psychology, as well as leaving him with a constant latent suspicion that he was not fully accepted by his peers.

⁹ TOURNIER Paul, *A Place for You, Psychology and Religion*, SCM Press, Ltd, London, 1975, p.204

Lesotho, Botswana, Burkina Faso, South Africa, and at the time to Senegal. *General Conference (GC)* Mennonites such as most of the missionaries included in the study, entered African mission service through *CIM/AIMM*, because as James Juhnke states in his account of the General Conference foreign mission endeavour, '(t)he General Conference foreign mission board did not have its own separate work in Africa, but became increasingly involved through the *CIM*, especially after World War II.'¹⁰

Refining and Reformulating my Position

Some preliminary investigations among female Mennonite missionaries in general and those included in the eventual case study in particular indicated that they struggled seriously with aspects of missionary life and that issues related to their cultural re-location did indeed play a significant role. I therefore re-formulated my initial theory on the basis of my actual case study to:

A personal sense of divine calling represents a significant potential support factor for missionaries in their cultural re-location experience.

Here I borrowed further from Paul Tournier in assuming that a sense of divine calling might act as a 'super-centering' reference point in a cultural relocation experience. To illustrate this concept of super-centering Tournier uses the example of someone crossing the road while at the same time being afraid of doing so. At the beginning of their crossing they use the close side of the road as a safe point of reference. Once they are past half way they begin to refer to the far side as a place where they will soon be safe. The critical moment occurs when they find themselves right in the middle of the road with both sides equally far away. If at that moment they should focus on a third point of reference, e.g. God, the fact that they are far removed from the security of either side of the road becomes largely irrelevant through their super-centering on God who becomes their new source of safety. Similarly I assumed that super-centering on a sense of call would help missionaries in overcoming the problem of leaving behind the natural and cultural safety of their community, nationality, and geography by providing them with a new point of reference.

The great majority of people, both lay persons and academics, whom I consulted about the theory of a personal sense of divine calling being an important potential support factor agreed with it. Retrospectively, with the benefit of knowing the results of the research, I remember however that one particular professor added as an aside that if against expectations the theory should turn out not to be correct I would *really* have a thesis on my hands.

¹⁰ JUHNKE James, *A People of Mission, A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Mission, Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 1979, p.68*

So I set out confident that my findings would bear out my theory and that the entire investigation would more or less be straight forward; but it turned out differently, as my thesis documents.

My new Position

The original position that a personal sense of a divine call acts as a significant potential support factor for missionaries in their re-location experience was with the occasional exception, born out by the findings of the study as far as the missionaries' short term experience.

However, in the long run such a sense of call also had the potential to turn against the missionaries and become a destructive rather than a constructive element in their ability to cope with their cultural re-location. This was the case if the sense of a divine call was accompanied by an unrealistic view both of self and of God. In examining this further I have introduced the concept of 'burden' to describe various potentially negative and destructive elements of a sense of call as opposed to the reality of the call itself. Based on my findings I arrived at the following new position:

In order for a sense of a divine call to act as a long-term support factor for the missionaries' cultural re-location experience, the sense of call has to be imbedded in a realistic, 'spiritually mature' understanding of God, self and the call.

In this context it is important to note that such spiritual realism can never be grasped; it is never static but rather dynamic as it goes through ebb and flow phases. Therefore in order for the sense of call to be a support factor it has to grow with the challenge.

My thesis shows how and why my original assumptions had to be modified as inadequate in describing the full range of experience that was uncovered in my case study. Further, it reinforced the view that a sense of call is highly subjective yet can be understood in terms of a particular religious and theological tradition and upbringing that provides its substance, symbols and orientation.

Methodological Framework

Theological-Historical and Mission-Historical Study

In order to test the original theory that a sense of divine calling may act as a significant support factor to missionaries in their cultural relocation experience, the study takes the following structural approach:

A first theological-historical section investigates in three chapters important distinctives of Anabaptist/Mennonite faith and practice. It should be noted that I refer on

occasion to the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition. When I do so I affirm the theological and historical connection between the 16th century Anabaptist movement and contemporary Mennonite churches. This continuity was the central focal point of an influential mid-20th century US Mennonite movement, originally led by H.S. Bender, that endeavoured a 'Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision.'

The connection between 16th century Anabaptism and modern Mennonitism is traced in order to provide some in-depth background information for a better understanding of important aspects of the women's socio-religious profile and of the phenomenology of their sense of calling. Where I simply refer to the Mennonite tradition I have contemporary Mennonites in mind.

Two of the theological-historical and mission-historical chapters deal with what may be considered in Anabaptist/Mennonite theology the two-fold archetypal divine call, namely the call to discipleship and the call to be in the world but not of it while the third one concerns itself with the role of Anabaptist/Mennonite women.

The theological-historical and mission historical chapters largely deal with subjects that are well-documented in Mennonite theology and historiography. They therefore rely on secondary literature. This includes relevant books, articles, treatises, etc., which deal with the Anabaptist/Mennonite concept of discipleship, with their ecclesiological emphasis on being in the world but not of the world, and with the role of Anabaptist/Mennonite women. These sources are listed in the Bibliography.

Case Study

This study represents a case study as opposed to a comparative study. This implies that although the findings are based on Mennonite women in missions it does not necessarily mean that missionaries from other denominations might not have similar experiences. However, certain phenomena are directly linked by the missionaries themselves to the fact that they were Mennonites. These Mennonite-specific phenomena serve as a special focal point of this study. It would be very interesting to compare the findings of this particular case study to similar ones conducted on missionary women of other denominations. The decision to base the study on Mennonite missionaries is partly due to details of my personal autobiography. Coming from a Mennonite background I have a certain amount of insider knowledge of Mennonite faith and practice, which I expected would stand me in good stead in such an investigation. Also certain distinctives of Mennonite theology seemed particularly suited to this study. Among these distinctives I had in mind the traditional concept of Christ's call to discipleship. This understanding of the call incorporates such elements as a high degree of preparedness to suffer for the sake of Christ, and a strong emphasis on selfless service, which I assumed would equip Mennonites with a particularly helpful faith framework for the challenges of missionary

life. In addition their typical ecclesiological emphasis on being in the world but not of the world seemed to potentially provide them with Mennonite-specific coping mechanisms in the cultural re-location and alienation they would experience in the course of their life in foreign mission service. All the more so as their history as a people is characterised by frequent migration for the sake of their faith.

This section is based on the women's personal evidence - both oral and written. These primary sources are dealt with further in Part Two of the dissertation which describes the case study in more detail. They are also listed in the Bibliography.

The Research Question

My field of enquiry is Mennonite women missionaries in Africa. My research questions has three interrelated parts: How do they understand their calling, how is it related to the Anabaptist/Mennonite theological-historical and mission-historical distinctives, and to what extent is it a support factor in their cultural re-location experience?

Ethical Considerations: Confidentiality

The information for the case study was gathered from archival and oral material in the form of interviews. The details of the information gathering process are described at the beginning of the case study in part two of the dissertation.

In both the archival and oral material the names of the missionaries included in my case study have been omitted. Instead the women are listed as Missionary 1, 2, 3 etc. The archival documents (AD) are listed as AD 1, 2, 3 etc. Permission to use the archival material was obtained through Professor James C. Juhnke. In order to help protect the confidentiality of those missionaries who are still serving on the mission field I was only given access to material dated 1980 and older.

Everybody who contributed orally was asked at the end of the interview if in principle they consented to the publication of their testimonies, or if there were any sections that they would prefer to remain unpublished. All agreed in principle. Where there were sections they preferred not to be published I honoured their wishes. Where necessary I have minimized references to specific locations and names that might reveal identity. Ethics approval for the thesis was granted by the Faculty of Humanities.

Pastoral Concern

At the centre of my investigation lies a pastoral concern. This concern is based on various considerations. Firstly, as a Swiss immigrant to my adopted country of South Africa and as an ordained minister, I had some first hand experience of what might loosely be viewed as the life of a missionary. My own experience of re-locating from Switzerland into what I

experienced as a very foreign South African culture has been neither smooth nor swift. This led me to suspect that other missionaries too might be struggling with their re-location process to the extent that for many it might prove to be not only a re-location but a dis-location experience. Secondly, the missionary vocation like that of the ministry is traditionally linked to a sense of a personal divine calling. I speak of 'sense' because such callings are inevitably subjective and difficult to evaluate. Thirdly, traditionally Christian marriages are to various degrees patriarchal and hierarchical. In the mission context this may result in a tendency to assume that the husband's sense of call automatically extends to the wife. This provides potentially fertile ground for a pastoral enquiry on the effects of a personal sense of call or a lack thereof - something powerfully illustrated by the missionary wife's lack of call and its dramatic consequences in Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible*,¹¹ a novel to which I will refer again in my closing remarks, where I distinguish between the missionary call as an obligation or law as contrasted with the call as God's gracious invitation to follow in trust. This, in many respects, takes us to the heart of the problem that lies at the centre of the thesis, something that I describe by contrasting the call as burden or as a support factor and therefore as a blessing.

An initial cursory glance over relevant literature confirmed my premise that underlies this thesis, namely that missionaries are struggling with a significant attrition problem. The *ReMAP* Research Report,¹² for example, quotes an average figure of 5,1 percent of workers of each mission society per year, or 1 missionary in 20 per year who prematurely left mission service between 1992-1994. This figure is based on a sample of mission agencies of various sizes from 14 different countries.¹³ In addition the above mentioned list of missionary challenges confirmed that issues related to their cultural relocation indeed played a prominent role in the missionaries' struggles.

¹¹ KINGSOLVER Barbara, *The Poisonwood Bible*, Faber and Faber, 2000, First published in the USA by Harper Collins 1998

¹² 'Missionary Attrition: The ReMAP Research Report,' pp.85-103

¹³ The countries included were 6 'old sending countries,' (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, UK and USA) and 8 from 'new sending countries,' (Brazil, Costa Rica, Ghana, India, South Korea, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Singapore.)

PART ONE

Anabaptist/Mennonite Theological Distinctives

CHAPTER ONE

Neither Protestant nor Catholic

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section investigates four historical key phases of Anabaptist/Mennonite mission praxis. The second section examines the distinctive theological premises which are woven into the praxis. The chapter investigates praxis before theory based on the observation that in the emergence of new movements praxis tends to precede the systematic formulation of its premises. Both sections of the chapter pay special attention to the fact that in crucial aspects Anabaptist practice and theology are neither truly Protestant nor Catholic.

Mennonite Mission Praxis in Historical Context

From the mid-20th century research into the roots of Anabaptism has increasingly focused on the Catholic nature of some of its major tenets.¹ Others have further developed this line of thinking² to the extent that C. Arnold Snyder writes in his normative contemporary *Anabaptist History and Theology*,³ 'Anabaptist reform (...) continued to resonate to the late medieval monastic ideal (...).'⁴ This, as we will see, is evident both in their mission praxis and its underlying theological perspective.

Establishing the True Church

At the core of the first early 16th century phase of Mennonite mission praxis was their vision to restore the church to its original New Testament state, both internally and externally. For them

¹ Groundbreaking work in identifying the polygenetic origins of Anabaptism has originally done by Stayer, Packull and Deppermann. Cf. *i.a.* STAYER James M., PACKULL Werner O., DEPPERMANN Klaus, 'From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins,' *MQR* 49, 1975 pp.51-147

² One of the first modern authors to refer to the Monastic/Mendicant influences in early Anabaptism was the 19th century theologian Albrecht Ritschl in, Ritschl Albrecht, *Three Essays*, 'Prolegomena to the History of Pietism,' in 'Prolegomena, The Distinctiveness and Origin of the Anabaptists,' Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1972, pp.70-83

³ SNYDER C. Arnold, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ont., 1995

⁴ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.18

such a restoration entailed three main tenets. Firstly, it called all people to true repentance and spiritual rebirth. Secondly, this internal change had to be authenticated through the visible fruit of a changed life. Thirdly, as a result, it re-defined what constitutes the true church, which could no longer be defined as *Corpus Christianum*, an ecclesiastic body, where the wheat coexists with the tares. Instead, they believed that the true church was the purified *Corpus Christi*, a visible body of repented and regenerated believers, which inwardly and outwardly patterned itself on the original church of the New Testament.

Those who through repentance and faith had entered the kingdom of God, became acutely aware of the distinction between the church and the un-regenerated world, and based on this dichotomous world view, developed a strong missionary vision. As Hans Kasdorf shows, the Great Commission shaped every early Anabaptist's Christian calling.⁵ It contained not only the call to repentance and faith, but also, as it does in Pietism, the call to a sanctified life.⁶ The centre of their missionary drive was formed by the local faith communities.

As the 'world' began to respond to the newly formed, mission-minded Anabaptist movement with increased hostility, and eventually open persecution,⁷ they dispersed, carrying the call to repentance and regenerated lives with them wherever they went. In addition, they soon began to designate roving missionaries from among their ranks,⁸ whose credentials were pneumatic rather than academic education. The movement employed rudimentary mission strategies. A first serious unified attempt at formalising their witness was made at the 1627 Augsburg meeting, which in retrospect became known as the Martyr's Synod, because one year after it took place nearly all the participants had died a martyr's death.

Over time the extensiveness and severity of the persecution to which they were subjected took its toll on the Anabaptist mission spirit. As a result they suffered the first collective case of missionary burn out, an event that deeply traumatised the movement, the consequences of which are even today still being dealt with.⁹ Eventually, large parts of the

⁵ KASDORF Hans, 'Der Missionsbefehl bei den Täufern im 16. Jahrhundert: Seine Bedeutung damals und heute,' in *Mission im Zeichen des Friedens, Beiträge zur Geschichte täuferisch-mennonitischer Mission*, Logos Verlag GmbH/BTG, Lage, 2003, p.44

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gottfried Riesen describes in his article '500 Jahre eigenständiges Pfarramt Affoltern im Emmental, 1484-1984,' the escalating categories of persecution in the case of the Emmental (Bernese) Anabaptists as: prison, confiscation of possessions, banning into exile, banning to the gullies and execution. (RIESEN Gottfried, in Zingg Alfred, '500 Jahre eigenständiges Pfarramt Affoltern im Emmental, 1484-1984,' in *Mennonitica Helvetica*, 1984, No.3, p.47)

⁸ Cf. 'Der Missionsbefehl bei den Täufern im 16. Jahrhundert,' p.43

⁹ Cf. for example the recent reconciliation approaches between the Anabaptists and the Protestant state churches in Switzerland during the 2007 *Täuferjahr*.

movement entered agreements with their political and religious adversaries, stipulating that if the Anabaptists refrained from further open missionary activities they would be permitted to practice their faith in specially designated areas in relative peace.

Die Stillen im Lande

The withdrawn and isolationist phase that followed the movement's initial *Sturm und Drang* period lasted for almost three centuries. During this time the movement increasingly lost two of its original defining features, as John H. Yoder, one of the 20th century's most influential Mennonite leaders, points out in his article 'Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality.'¹⁰ Firstly, from an internal perspective, the movement began to lose its truly voluntary nature. Where in the early days outsiders joined the group based on their convictions, over time a Mennonite became somebody who was 'in-born.' Secondly, and inevitably the movement lost, at least until the end of the 19th century, its missionary spirit. As a result its numbers remained more or less static.¹¹ Based on these developments Anabaptist/Mennonite movement in its second phase began to increasingly resemble the *Corpus Christianum*, which their ancestors had once fought so vigorously as a perversion of the true church. In the words of Yoder, the Anabaptist *Corpus Christi* had mutated into a *Corpusculum Christianum*.¹²

In an additional shift their emphasis on the direct pneumatic empowerment, which had been an important feature of their first generation religious life, began to give way to a tendency to formalism, and many erstwhile dynamic spiritual experiences began to calcify into religious-cultural values. Aided by their exile existence they began to develop a strong, distinctive introspective socio-religious culture that set rigorous criteria for the definition of a 'good Mennonite.'

A Burden for Souls

The Anabaptist/Mennonite missionary spirit that had been dormant for centuries, apart from isolated revivals, was re-awakened in the 19th century when the great Protestant missionary revival swept the churches in the Western hemisphere. There was widespread optimism in the West, where emerging news about distant countries increasingly enticed those with an adventurous spirit to travel and explore. James C. Juhnke, mentions that during this time the Mennonite church too experienced a period of 'confidence and growth.'¹³

¹⁰ YODER John H., 'Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality,' in *Consultation on Anabaptist Mennonite Theology*, A.J. Klassen (ed.), publ. by the Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970, pp.1-46

¹¹ Ibid., pp.6f

¹² Ibid., pp.6 *et al.*

¹³ *A People of Mission*, p.89

As the modern Protestant mission revival began to reach many of the withdrawn Mennonite communities, their long lost missionary vision was rekindled. As a result modern Anabaptist/Mennonite missions became 'a twice-born movement.'¹⁴ Juhnke points out that in its second manifestation, however, the 16th century Anabaptist distinctives were largely replaced by the prevailing revivalist characteristics of the main stream Protestant mission movement,¹⁵ which were increasingly adopted by 'acculturated' Mennonite communities.

As had been the case with the early Anabaptist movement, the modern mission movement took the Great Commission as its point of departure. God called his servants to go and make disciples, and the servant was expected to respond in humble obedience. This understanding of the call instilled in the early modern missionaries a strong *Sendungsbewusstsein*. The early Anabaptists had called the existing church to once again become the true church; the missionaries' *Sendungsbewusstsein* was rooted in their sense of responsibility for those in far away lands, who had never heard the gospel. This is evident from the following 1861 mission statement of the General Conference, newly constituted in 1860:

If we as Mennonites are not to increase our guilt by longer neglecting the duty of missions commanded by the Lord (...) we must, not singly, but as a denomination, make missions the work of the Lord.¹⁶

The *CIM/AIMM* mission agency, through which GC Conference Mennonites who form part of the case study were sent to Africa, was born out of a similar concern. According to Jim Bertsche, author of the comprehensive history of *CIM/AIMM*,¹⁷ the missionary vision of its founding members, was inspired by the biblical challenge 'about being witnesses even "unto the uttermost part of the earth."¹⁸ The organisation was established by a group of spiritually awakened Amish, who in the early 20th century had been confronted with the emerging news about the spiritual and physical need of the African continent.¹⁹ The mission, as mentioned in

¹⁴ Ibid., p.2

¹⁵ According to Juhnke 'it had grown out of eighteenth-century Pietism and a subsequent evangelical awakening.' Ibid., p.2

¹⁶ Ibid., p.5

¹⁷ BERTSCHE Jim, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, Copyright held by Jim Bertsche, 1998.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.6

¹⁹ In a first history of *CIM* William B. Weaver writes, 'our primary emphasis has been spiritual and not economic, educational or even medical. But on the other hand, we also learn that we could not ignore the economic, educational and medical in our program of work.' WEAVER William B., *Thirty-Five Years in the Congo, A History of the Demonstrations of Divine Power in the Congo*, Congo Inland Mission, Chicago 36, Illinois, 1945, p.16

the introduction, was originally constituted in 1911 by members of the *Central Conference of Mennonites* (formerly known as Stucky Amish) and of the *Defenseless Mennonite Church* (formerly the Egly²⁰ Amish), in Meadows, Illinois. It first called itself *United Mennonite Board* before being re-named *Congo Inland Mission* in 1912.

As was generally the case in the early mission revival at the root of the Mennonite mission revival was the awareness that God's call to go into all the world had to be obeyed. This was combined with a sense of responsibility for those who would be lost without Christ. In retrospect it is clearly evident that in their *Sendungsbewusstsein*, particularly the early missionaries unselfconsciously mixed cultural elements into their spiritual message. This was as true for the Mennonites as it was for missionaries from other denominations. Lesslie Newbigin observes in this regard that at the World Missionary Conference of the World Council of Churches of 1910 '... there was still an unshaken confidence in the future of Western civilization as the bearer of the gospel to the "backward peoples."²¹ This cultural confidence was often mixed with a form of religious over self-confidence that flowed from many missionaries' certainty that they had been commissioned to their task by Christ himself, who was Christ the victor.

However this sense of assurance was tempered, particularly for the earlier missionaries, by the hardships and dangers that life in missions entailed, including the very real possibility that they might lose their lives in their service for the Lord. This is one of the reasons why in those days the missionary call was, according to Wilbert Shenk,²² viewed by many as the 'highest degree of Christian surrender,'²³ which 'called for heroic sacrifice.'²⁴ As a result missionaries were often put on a pedestal in their home communities, which isolated them from their peers, especially in their times of weakness and vulnerability, by forcing them into the unrealistic position of 'missionary sainthood.'

From *Sendungsbewusstsein* to Servanthood

The optimism of the early modern mission era was replaced by a more cautious mood that began to develop in the western churches in the era between the two World Wars. In this the Mennonites were no exception. Juhnke wrote:

²⁰ Spelt by Juhnke as 'Egli.' *A People of Mission*, p.67

²¹ NEWBIGIN Lesslie, *The Open Secret, An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Revised Edition, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, pp.8f

²² SHENK Wilbert A. 'Die Mennoniten und das Evangelikale Netzwerk,' in *Mission im Zeichen des Friedens*, p.120

²³ German: 'Das höchste Mass christlicher Hingabe,' transl. mine

²⁴ German: 'rief zum heldenhaften Opfer auf,' transl. mine.

Somewhere in the twentieth century, the mood of progressive optimism and self-confidence began to disintegrate. The Progressive Era gave way to an Age of Anxiety under the assault of the two world wars, worldwide depression, social upheaval, and intellectual relativism and nihilism in a variety of forms.²⁵

Simultaneously major rifts began to appear between the theologically conservative and liberal wings of large parts of the Mennonite community. These tensions also affected their mission endeavour,²⁶ and specifically the mission boards. Initially the GC mission board was dominated by its theologically conservative element. In order to consolidate conservatism new Mennonite tertiary theological institutions were founded, such as the Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska.²⁷ As Juhnke mentions, Grace Bible Institute, which 'was designed to be an alternative to the established liberal arts colleges (...) produced many missionaries for work under the General Conference as well as other mission boards from the 1950s onward.'²⁸ As a result of the theological dominance of the conservative element on the mission board, post World War I GC missionaries had to sign a creed that had been specifically designed to ensure their orthodoxy. Over time, however, a significant theological shift occurred, and the GC mission board eventually acquired the reputation of being 'liberal.'²⁹ Yet, the board succeeded in more or less holding a centre through their 'common commitment to overseas missions.'³⁰

The theological position of the mission board was important insofar as it was largely responsible for evaluating the sense of call of the missionary candidates. Originally the board consisted of 'farmer-preachers,' who 'operated on an informal non-professional basis.'³¹ The guiding principle they employed in evaluating candidates was 'to send missionaries who would proclaim the gospel and do the things that missionaries do.'³² Only after World War II, and again in the 1970, did the board become more formally organised and 'managed.'³³

Over time a different movement gained momentum in the GC and other Mennonite communities and began to shape the thinking on the nature of the missionary call. This

²⁵ *A People of Mission*, p.91

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, pp.89ff

²⁷ It formed part of a general trend of the Evangelical movement at the time to found tertiary institutions with a specific missionary focus. Cf. 'Die Mennoniten und das Evangelikale Netzwerk,' p.120

²⁸ *A People of Mission*, p. 96. Many women included in the case study were educated at Grace Bible Institute.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.83

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.97

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.102

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p.104

movement understood itself as a response to the socio-religious adaptation, that had occurred in large parts of the Mennonite church, to conservative Protestantism and to American culture as a whole. It was the goal of the movement to recover the original distinctives of Anabaptist theology. These included such concepts as discipleship, the Christological concept of Christ the suffering servant, etc. According to Wilbert A. Shenk, 'the first Mennonite missionaries, who were directly influenced by the historic-theological movement of the "Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision," were (...) sent out around 1950.'³⁴ Juhnke provides some indication of the degree to which the movement over time found its way into Mennonite society when he quotes a survey conducted in the mid 1970 by two Mennonite sociologists, who 'discovered that a substantial majority of contemporary Mennonites do in fact agree to the distinguishing principles of Anabaptism.'³⁵ Partly as a result of this development, the missionary call increasingly changed from that of *Sendungsbewusstsein* to servanthood. The Mennonite-internal development, which in missionary terms *i.a.* generated a new appreciation of 'the other,' tied in with a general development in the churches of the West and their changing view of the missionary call. While in the early phase of mission history '*the younger churches were only marginally acknowledged,*' Lesslie Newbigin observes that already '(at) Jerusalem in there was a fuller acknowledgement of the younger churches and a much more acute awareness of the ambiguities of Western power and of the worldwide impact of Western secularism.'³⁶ For the *AIMM* this increasing acknowledgement of the mission churches culminated in what Juhnke calls 'turning over the keys'³⁷ to the leaders of the Congolese mission church in 1959, and eventually the country's integration of the mission and the national church.

In 1979, at Miracle Camp in Michigan, *AIMM* devised its new mission statement. It included statements such as 'Believers of every race, color and nationality are part of the universal church of Jesus Christ,' and 'the new life in Christ leads to a new life in the world. As a member of God's new community and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the believer earnestly seeks to live a life of servanthood in word and deed.'³⁸ This servant-mentality found further expression in the missionary work with the African Independent Churches.³⁹

³⁴ 'Die Mennoniten und das Evangelikale Netzwerk,' p.130. According to Shenk this is the case, because the Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision was primarily a tool to revitalise traditional Mennonitism, and not mission (praxis). (ibid.)

³⁵ *A People of Mission*, p.100

³⁶ *The Open Secret*, p.8

³⁷ *A People of Mission*, p.86

³⁸ *CIM/AIMM A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, p.313

³⁹ This work was to be seen as 'a low-profile ministry of servanthood. Missionaries were counselled to bear a non-judgmental spirit, even when they found certain practises of the churches strange and distasteful. (...) They were expected to learn as well as to teach. (*A People of Mission*, p.203)

The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision

Historical-Theological Context

The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision is a significant North American theological-historical movement within the Mennonite community, which had its origins in the first half of the 20th century. Its aim was to re-introduce into contemporary North American Mennonite society important distinctives of the early Anabaptist movement. The term Anabaptist Vision was first introduced into public debate in 1943 by Harold S. Bender, who is commonly considered to be the father of the movement, in his seminal presidential address to the American Society of Church History. The address was originally printed in 'Church History' and the 'Mennonite Quarterly Review,' and later reprinted in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*.⁴⁰

Bender's work and that of other like-minded Mennonite scholars was based on their perception that many contemporary North American communities of Anabaptist origins had lost important aspects of the original Anabaptist faith and practice. They attributed this loss of Anabaptist authenticity to two main developments: firstly, to the significant amalgamation that had over time occurred between Anabaptist/Mennonite theology and 'foreign' theological influences, and secondly, to the serious petrification that had over time turned the dynamic and outward-looking Anabaptist reform movement into a predominantly inward-looking Anabaptist/Mennonite religious culture.

At its core the Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision is an inherently retrospective concept twice over. First the 16th century Anabaptists had viewed the New Testament church as the 'true' model, which they had endeavoured to introduce into their 16th century movement, and then the Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision Movement in turn attempted to import the 16th century Anabaptist model of the church into 20th century Mennonitism. There are certain dangers attached to employing such a retrospective perspective in order to reform contemporary faith realities,⁴¹ the biggest danger being that of losing the heart of a past faith model by recovering only its external form.

⁴⁰ BENDER Harold S., 'The Anabaptist Vision,' in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, Guy F. Hersherberger, (ed.), Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa. 1957, pp.29-54; reprinted from 'Church History,' 13, March 1944, pp.3-24, and 'MQR,' 18, April 1944, pp.67-88, with slight revisions in text and footnotes.

⁴¹ Similar attempts at reform have been made at various points of Anabaptist/Mennonite history. One major attempt was undertaken by Thielman Jansz van Braght, the editor of the *Martyr's Mirror*. His purpose for compiling this work was to reform the 17th century Dutch Anabaptist movement, because of its considerable acculturation to Dutch society. Van Braght's preferred tool for reform was stories of the suffering of the 'true' church. These were supposed to encourage his contemporaries to once again produce the visible fruit of discipleship, and through the resulting maladjustment to the 'world' become a suffering church once again.

Next we investigate some of the key theological Anabaptist distinctives, which came into renewed focus through the attempt to recover the original Anabaptist Vision.

Hermeneutic Principles

As does every faith tradition, the Anabaptists employed certain distinctive hermeneutic principles. Seeing that at the heart of the movement was their attempt to restore the church to its biblical form, we begin with their approach to Scripture. Here they applied two main principles: firstly, their choice of their canon within the canon, and secondly, their interpretation of the scriptural text.

The Anabaptists had a distinctive view of the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. John C. Wenger in his investigation into the Biblicism of the Anabaptists⁴² wrote that while they 'regarded all the Scripture as the inspired and authoritative Word of God,'⁴³ it is well documented that they attributed differing values to the Old and New Testaments. Their main focus was on the New Testament, which in their view superseded the Old. As Wenger puts it, they 'felt that God's final word was in the New Testament, not in the preparatory dispensation of the Old.'⁴⁴ Not only did they focus on the fundamentals of the New Testament message, but they tried to order their church in such a way 'that all doctrine and practice must have New Testament support.'⁴⁵ Within the New Testament itself, they focused on the words and life of Jesus, particularly as recorded in the Sermon of the Mount. This passage to them represented their canon within the Canon. This view of Scripture as a progressive revelation, or as an 'uneven,' or 'non-flat' Bible,' was found among the mainline Anabaptists, including the Swiss Anabaptists, and later also in the tradition of Menno Simons.⁴⁶ In Menno Simon's case this is clearly evident from a set of statistics provided by William Keeney, as quoted by K.R. Davis, which shows that Menno Simons 'cites the New Testament 3 1/2 times more than the Old, and 40 percent of the New Testament citations originate from the Gospels.'⁴⁷

The second distinctive hermeneutic approach to the Bible was the tools they used to interpret Scripture. In this regard it is important to point out that the concept of the priesthood of believers, which had been recovered by the Anabaptists and many other Sermon on the

⁴² WENGER John C., 'The Biblicism of the Anabaptists,' in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, pp.167-179

⁴³ Ibid., p.176

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.162

⁴⁷ DAVIS Kenneth Ronald, *Anabaptism and Asceticism, A Study in Intellectual Origins*, Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, Kitchener, Ontario, 1974, p.216

Mount reform movements, encouraged in every member of the church a thorough knowledge of the Word of God. According to Wenger the Anabaptists were 'distinguished by a diligent study of the Scriptures from the moment of their conversion.'⁴⁸ For all their knowledge, however, their approach to studying Scripture was, according to Cornelius Dyck,⁴⁹ more practical than methodical:

While they may have engaged in studying entire books of the Bible, the evidence points to a more topical approach, with particular focus on issues critical to their life and death: baptism, the Lord's Supper, the nature of the true and false church, how to endure suffering, and above all the work of Christ.⁵⁰

One of the chief hermeneutic tools they applied to the task was their simple brand of faith, which, especially in the movement's early stage, relied heavily on the dynamic inner witness of the Holy Spirit which for them 'provided the essential underpinning for biblical interpretation.'⁵¹ Snyder stresses that during that phase 'Anabaptism of all kinds was based on a lively pneumatology.'⁵² While 'the rank and file of the Swiss Brethren, the Austrian Hutterian Brethren, and the Dutch 'Menists' identified the text of Scripture with the Word of God,'⁵³ pneumatic inspiration as a critical hermeneutic tool was generally accepted to varying degrees among all the early generations of Anabaptists, from the already mentioned more literal minded Zurich Anabaptists and Dutch Menists, via the mystic South Germans to the social revolutionaries. This sensitivity to the inner witness provided an antidote against interpreting the outer word, the Scriptures purely as a set of ethical-practical rules, even though this tendency was always latently present in the Anabaptist movement. It was partly rooted in their comparatively 'unsophisticated'⁵⁴ approach to the Bible, and a sceptical view of the human intellect which characterised much of the movement.⁵⁵ This suspicion of the

⁴⁸ 'The Biblicism of the Anabaptists,' p.167

⁴⁹ DYCK Cornelius: 'The Suffering Church in Anabaptism,' *MQR* 59,1985, pp.5-23

⁵⁰ 'The Suffering Church in Anabaptism,' pp.12f

⁵¹ Therefore, 'Anabaptist ethics and ecclesiology (too) rested on the living presence of the Spirit.' (*Anabaptist History and Theology* p.96)

⁵² *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.87

⁵³ 'The Biblicism of the Anabaptists,' p.173, although Melchior Hoffman who in its early history exerted a strong influence on the Dutch Anabaptists, reckoned with the 'possibility of direct revelations in dreams and visions.' (*Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.154); so did many other spiritualists.

⁵⁴ 'The Biblicism of the Anabaptists,' p.171

⁵⁵ Hubmaier who pursued an academic career represents the most prominent exception. (Cf. Moore, John Allen, *Anabaptist Portraits*, Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa., Kitchner Ont., 1984, pp.165f)

human intellect was based on their serious misgivings about 'the inadequacy and danger of 'intellectualism without piety.'⁵⁶ This desire for purity of faith potentially lends itself to a certain narrowness and fearfulness, especially when juxtaposed with Luther's and other mainstream reformer's notion of the 'Freiheit des Christenmenschen.'

To illustrate this point Blanke contrasts Grebel's interpretation of Scripture with that of Zwingli on the occasion of their dispute regarding the time of day at which the Lord's Supper should be celebrated. Grebel demanded it should be in the evening – based on the precedence which Christ had set. Zwingli on the other hand saw no need to deduce a general law from one incident. Blanke concludes:

Grebel and Zwingli had the same objective: they wanted to carry the Lord's Supper back to its Biblical form. But in doing so, Grebel was more bound to the literal wording of the Bible than was Zwingli. For Zwingli the time of the celebration of the time of the Lord's Supper was an external matter, for Grebel it was not.⁵⁷

The two differed in their approach insofar as 'Zwingli distinguished between essentials and incidentals in the Bible, a distinction, which was alien to Grebel.'⁵⁸ Blanke makes a telling pastoral observation regarding Grebel's nature and spirituality:

Conrad Grebel corresponds to a psychological type of earnest, pious people with a scrupulous turn of mind, who put a high value on the Bible as book of law (...). Such an approach is marked by a certain anxiousness. This was evident to Zwingli too, who called Grebel's attitude 'engstiglich (anxious).'⁵⁹

In its historic development, the movement's emphasis increasingly shifted towards focussing on the outer aspect, with significant consequences for the life of the believer and the call to discipleship. This is illustrated by Marjan Blok⁶⁰ who points out that in Menno's later hermeneutic in his *Dat Fundament*, the Gospel, the εὐαγγέλιον which undergirds discipleship, has taken on the form of *lex*.⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Anabaptism and Asceticism*, p.215

⁵⁷ BLANKE Fritz, *Brothers in Christ*, The history of the oldest Anabaptist congregation Zollikon, near Zurich, Switzerland, Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa., 1973, p.10

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ BLOK Marian, 'Discipleship in Menno Simon's *Dat Fundament*,' in *Menno Simons: A Reappraisal - Essays in Honour of Irvin B. Horst on the 450th Anniversary of the FUNDAMENTENBOEK*, pp.105-130

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 110f

This approach to scripture is more in line with medieval theology than with the Protestant tradition, where the Gospel is viewed as liberation from the Law. These medieval roots were picked up at the time of the Reformation already. Williams, in his classic work on Anabaptism, mentions that the 'radical sectarians' were accused by the magisterial Reformers (Luther, Zwingli and Calvin) of being in danger of 'escap(ing) the legalism of the Old Testament only to become more tightly bound by legalism based on the New.'⁶² They were 'therefore commonly charged by the classical Protestant divines not only with prolonging medieval Catholicism in the form of married 'monkery' but also of being Judaizers.'⁶³ This criticism will surface in various ways in what follows and, though often only implicit, it is fundamental to the thesis as will become explicit especially in the conclusion where the sense of call as obligation is countered by the call as an act of grace, a gracious invitation rather than a command.

This shift from the inner towards the outer was due to two main causes. Firstly, especially in the case of Menno Simons, it represented a response to the early excesses of the spiritualist section of the North German and Dutch movement, who had positioned the Spirit above the written Word. Secondly, the sequence of the inner and the outer, the Spirit and the letter, tends to change in favour of the latter, as a dynamic young movement moves into its second generation phase. Dennis D. Martin illustrates this based on the first-generation and second-generation stages of the Anabaptist movement and the Catholic church.⁶⁴ About the sequence of the outer and the inner in second-generation Catholic theology as practised at the time of the reformation on he observes:

... Catholicism (and most premodern, traditional religions) gives a certain kind of functional (not ultimate) priority to the outer as the indispensable sacramental vehicle for the inner.⁶⁵

About the early Anabaptist movement he says in contrast:

... first-generation Anabaptism gave priority to the inner, with the outer tagging along (Menno) or serving as co-witness (Marpeck).⁶⁶

This particular inner-outer relationship found in much of the early movement, provided according to Martin, first generation Anabaptist discipleship with its indispensable dynamism:

⁶² WILLIAM George Hunston, *The Radical Reformation*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1962, p.834

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ MARTIN Dennis D., 'Catholic Spirituality and Anabaptist and Mennonite Discipleship', *MQR* 62, 1988, pp.5-25

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.9

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Anabaptists disconnected discipleship from worship and the sacraments and attached it instead to the direct empowerment of the Holy Spirit - Anabaptism and most post-Reformation spiritual movements being charismatic and spiritualistic rather than liturgical and institutional, at least in the first generation.⁶⁷

C. Arnold Snyder, similarly describes the work of the Holy Spirit the factor without which Anabaptism would have been 'a far different movement – or most probably no “movement” at all.'⁶⁸ By describing the Anabaptist church as a product of the work of the Holy Spirit Snyder not only touches on the movement's early relationship between the inner and the outer but he also diverts the focus from the predominantly anthropocentric discussion of the church and of discipleship that we tend to encounter in Anabaptist/Mennonite literature, to its divine dimension, which was clearly strong during the movement's early phase. He goes so far as to locate the work of the Holy Spirit at the very centre of the early movement:

It was the renovating power of the living God, the power of the Holy Spirit, that provided the fundamental groundwork for subsequent Anabaptist spirituality and discipleship.⁶⁹

In the context of our overall investigation this statement is relevant in two crucial aspects. Firstly, with regard to the 20th century attempt at recovering the Anabaptist Vision it implies that the outer form of early Anabaptism cannot be transferred into the modern era without its inner dimension. Secondly, the missionaries would face a similar inner-outer tension in their mission situation, where the temptation exists to reduce missions to a merely human act. This temptation in turn can have serious pastoral implications as will become clear in our field work section.

Our discussion of key Anabaptist hermeneutic principles provides the framework for the following investigation into the nature of Anabaptist Christology and anthropology.

Theological Perspectives

An Ontological Christology and an Optimistic Regenerative Anthropology

In the discussion of Anabaptist Christology and anthropology it is important to state with C. Arnold Snyder that on the whole,

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.96

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.300

(a)ccptance of the historical Christian *doxa* or teachings, as summarised in the ecumenical Creeds and symbols, was common to all Anabaptist movements.⁷⁰

Their doctrine of Christ was based on the Christological statements of the *Apostolicum*,⁷¹ with most of the rank and file not attempting to go beyond the rudimentary creed.

The one noteworthy exception to their orthodoxy is the ontological Christology held by some of their foremost leaders, most notably Menno Simons.

Their un-orthodox Christology consisted of a monophysite view of Christ, a doctrine otherwise found in the ancient Church of Alexandria as well as in late medieval mysticism.

Monophysitism was originally introduced to the Anabaptists branch of the Low Countries through Melchior Hoffman,⁷² - who had probably adopted it from the spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld, and who had passed it on *i.a.* to Menno Simons. As Ernst Saxer in his 'Die Christologie des Menno Simons im Vergleich zur Lehre der Reformatoren, insbesondere Calvins'⁷³ points out, Menno initially felt compelled to focus on the issue on the insistence of his adversaries rather than on his own inclination. This is evident, for example, from the fact that it was against his will that his written report on his first disputation on the nature of Christ with Johannes a Lasco, a 'Brief Confession on the Incarnation,' (1455),⁷⁴ (1544? Snyder p.359) was publicly distributed.

Saxer states that Menno's monophysite Christology was motivated by a soteriological concern,⁷⁵ as was commonly the case with the proponents of this teaching. Menno reasoned that only if Christ's human nature was fully imbued with his divine nature would he be able to effectively redeem sinful humankind. Menno dealt with this soteriological aspect of his Christology more prominently in his second treatise on the

⁷⁰ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.84

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷² His teaching was monophysite - to the point of docetism (*Anabaptist History and Theology*, pp.84/154/357), or quasi-docetism (*Ibid.*, p.302) and had been 'inherited, and modified from Caspar Schwenckfeld,' (*Ibid.*, pp.34/356)

⁷³ SAXER Ernst, 'Die Christologie des Menno Simons im Vergleich zur Lehre der Reformatoren, insbesondere Calvins,' in *Mennonitica Helvetica: Organ des Schweizerischen Vereins für Täufergeschichte*, Gümligen, No. 20, 1997, p. 11-23

⁷⁴ *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons (CWMS) c.1496-1561*, Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, Pa., 1984, pp.422-454

⁷⁵ It was particularly in his younger years that he emphasised this soteriological aspect, at a time in his life when soteriology formed the core of his theology. It is widely accepted that in his later years a significant shift occurred in his theological emphasis from repentance and spiritual rebirth to that of their implications for the Christian life and for the *ecclesia*. Cf. *inter al.* 'Die Christologie des Menno Simons im Vergleich zur Lehre der Reformatoren, insbesondere Calvins,' p.15.

subject, entitled 'The Incarnation of Our Lord' (1554?),⁷⁶ where he argues monophysitism with increased conviction, as Saxer notes.⁷⁷

While officially this monophysite Christology did not survive beyond the 17th century, its influence lingered on in the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement, and remains symptomatic for what is generally acknowledged as the 'high' Christology of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement. As such it had significant implications both for the movement's anthropology and its soteriology.

The ontological Christology of the Anabaptist movement has as its corollary what Snyder describes as an 'optimistic regenerative anthropology.'⁷⁸ It is optimistic insofar as it assumes

... that human beings could, by the power and grace of God and the Holy Spirit, be remade in their human natures so that they would at least be on the path to sanctification in this life.⁷⁹

Menno reasoned along those lines when he stated that the pre-eminence of Christ's divine nature had to be reflected in the nature of the individual believer and by implication in the community of the saints, who are able to overcome the world. As the term 'overcoming the world' suggests, we find here not only a theological explanation for Anabaptist perfectionism⁸⁰ but also for their stark two-world paradigm.

Helmut Isaak⁸¹ provides the following additional insight into Menno's concept of human regeneration both individual and corporate as found in his early writings:

As the seed of life, it is implanted into the heart of the sinner and gives birth to a new spiritual being which is being recreated into the image of God. As sons of God and brothers of Christ, the regenerated sinners are able to do what is right and powerful to conquer sin and death. Although still subject to temptation, they sin no more. This regeneration which for Menno is like an ontological change of the human nature from earthly into heavenly, from fleshly into spiritual, is irreversible as long as the believers remain in God.

⁷⁶ *CWMS*, pp.785-834

⁷⁷ 'Die Christologie des Menno Simons im Vergleich zur Lehre der Reformatoren, insbesondere Calvins,' p.17

⁷⁸ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.358 et al

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.44

⁸⁰ We find similar perfectionist tendencies with a similar Christology in some parts of the monastic tradition.

⁸¹ ISAAK Helmut, 'Menno's Vision of the Anticipation of the Kingdom of God in his Early Writings,' in *Menno Simons a Reappraisal: Essays in Honor of Irvin B. Horst on the 450th Anniversary of the Fundamentenboek*, pp.57-82 p.58.

They also have moved over from the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God. As the spiritual bride of Christ, they are his holy congregation, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.⁸²

This quote further illustrates that at the base of this Christological/soteriological model lies a strong dichotomy between 'earthly' and 'heavenly,' 'fleshly' and 'spiritual,' the 'world' and the 'kingdom of God.'

The movement's 'optimistic' regenerative anthropology is diametrically opposed to that of the mainline reformers, all of whom held that, while being *justus* in a forensic sense, empirically the believers retained their lifelong *peccator* status, awaiting eschatological redemption. Although the reformers emphasise sanctification as an integral part of the Christian life it never takes on the salvific dimension as it does in traditional Anabaptist theology, where it is used as an authenticating tool for true repentance.

An important principle of the movement's optimistic regenerative anthropology is their assumption that humans possess a degree of free will. This vests the individual, although only through the enabling power of divine grace, with an ability to make salvific choices. This view is similarly found in the medieval ascetic tradition, as well as in Erasmian Christian humanism.

A Functional Christology and Anthropology

The Anabaptists' ontological Christology and optimistic regenerative anthropology was complemented by their functional Christology and a functional anthropology.

According to Bender the question 'what think ye of Christ?' is one of the determining factors for a true understanding of the Anabaptist call to discipleship.⁸³ He himself provided an initial answer to this question by contrasting Anabaptist Christology with that of major non-Mennonite traditions of his time. He felt that all of them were in danger for one reason or another of isolating Christ from real everyday life. For Bender 'Historic Lutheranism,' 'modern Fundamentalism,' and Dispensationalism, on the one hand he believed, tended to limit Christ's role to that of Saviour, and the believer's response to Christ to an overwhelming experience of forgiveness and grace. 'Classic Protestant theology,' and in particular Calvinism, on the other hand, were in danger of purely 'intellectualizing' or 'rationalizing Christ' while in Catholicism he perceived a tendency to view Christ primarily as an object of worship.⁸⁴ In comparison he stresses that Anabaptism not only views Christ as Prophet and Saviour, but also and particularly as Lord. The danger here is that this might result in too strong an emphasis on following

⁸² Ibid., p58

⁸³ 'The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship, p.27

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.27f

(the call to discipleship) as obligation demanding obedience as work, rather than as an invitation of grace eliciting a response of obedience as gratitude and trust.

However, in Anabaptist Christology Christ's lordship represents only one aspect of a typical dual functional Christology. Based on their distinctive hermeneutic principles, which make the Sermon on the Mount its scriptural core, their Christology focuses at least as much on his second aspect, namely his role as the lamb, the humble suffering servant, who was obedient to the cross. Marjan Blok identified and discussed this dualistic concept of Christ in Menno's *Dat Fundamentum*. It consists firstly of the sovereign Christ whose rule as judge and king extends over the entire creation and over the whole of humankind. It also applies to the believers over whom he rules through his Word and his Spirit, desiring to do it 'without force.' The second part of his dual Christology portrays Christ as the lamb that willingly suffered the cross.⁸⁵

This dual functional Christology is found generally in early mainstream Anabaptism. It too is reminiscent of medieval theology, and particular the monastic/brotherhood tradition, where Christ is typically seen as king and lamb. This again points to a significant link between the early Anabaptists and medieval theology and particularly the monastic/mendicant tradition which by now is well documented. John H. Yoder⁸⁶ also discovered a strong similarity between their respective Christologies. The author of the 'Schleitheim Confession,' the former Benedictine monk, Michael Sattler,

... understood the incarnate Christ to have been, above all, meek and lowly, the rejected, persecuted, suffering Christ who yielded up his will and, trusting wholly in God, walked the way of earthly trial through the cross on to death.⁸⁷

It is this lowly Christ who determines the movement's functional anthropology insofar as the disciple is called to follow Christ through their 'obedience to the king by following the lamb.'⁸⁸

Both the movement's ontological Christology and its optimistic regenerative anthropology had important consequences for the Anabaptist concept of salvation.

⁸⁵ Cf. Marian Blok's discussion of the Christology that underpins Menno Simon's concept of discipleship, in 'Discipleship in Menno Simon's *Dat Fundament*,' pp. 109-113

⁸⁶ YODER John H., (trans.), *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973, pp.22, 40, 58

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.58

⁸⁸ 'Discipleship in Menno Simon's *Dat Fundament*,' p.112

A Two-step Soteriology

As we discussed in connection with their optimistic regenerative anthropology, the Anabaptists viewed salvation as an internal and external reality. In other words they made an imperative link between the inner reality of repentance, spiritual rebirth and regeneration and the corresponding external visible fruit of the believer's 'works of love.' In this regard C. Arnold Snyder quotes a telling dialogue between 'Leonhart' and 'Hans,' from Hubmaier's catechism:

Leonhart.⁸⁹ How many kinds of faith are there? Hans: Two kinds, namely a dead one and a living one. Leonhart: What is a dead faith? Hans: One that is unfruitful and without the works of love, James 2:17. Leonhart: What is a living faith? Hans: One that produces the fruits of the Spirit and works through love, Gal.5. (348)⁹⁰

This imperative inner-outer link inherent in their doctrine of salvation causes Snyder to speak of a two-phased soteriology. The first step consists of repentance, spiritual rebirth and regeneration, which are solely based on divine grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. In a second step this new internal spiritual reality then has to manifest itself increasingly in the external fruit of obedience and love, without which salvation is not complete. This external aspect represents the positive human response to divine grace. However, it too is only possible through the divine enabling grace and the work of the Holy Spirit.

As Snyder further points out, it was therefore not regarding the *sola gratia* or the *sola fide* that the Anabaptists/Mennonites deviated from mainline Protestant theology. Rather it was their insistence on the external fruit of repentance and obedience, produced by the Holy Spirit, as a necessary authentication of their inner new birth and regeneration, that set them apart from mainline Protestantism.

This has far reaching implications for the believer. While in the case of Luther, for example, grace represents the point where the believer ceases to strive, this is not the case with the Anabaptists. Rather, as Alvin J. Beachy in his book on *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation*,⁹¹ points out, in Anabaptist theology grace becomes a means through which the believer may strive more successfully to overcome their sinful nature:

Because the believer must also carry throughout this life the burden of the sinful nature, which he has received from the first Adam, participation in the divine nature does not mean the possibility of a sinless life in the present world. Yet, the presence of grace in the believer's life, as it actualizes his

⁸⁹ Snyder uses two different spellings Leonhard as well as Leonhart

⁹⁰ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, pp.88f

⁹¹ BEACHY Alvin J., *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation*, Nieuwkoop B. De Graaf, Harrisonburg, 1976, p. 174

participation in the divine nature, means that the believer now has the possibility of striving against sin and, in a measure, of overcoming it.⁹²

Beachy goes so far as to describe the high degree of perfection the Anabaptist believer is expected to achieve as a form of divinization, when he states that the 'process of divinization is not completed until the believer reaches his eternal destiny as a theantropic individual.'⁹³

This soteriology is also reflected in the Anabaptist understanding of the sacraments.

Symbolic Sacraments rather than Means of Grace

The Anabaptists, similarly to Zwingli and Calvin and in contrast to Luther and the Catholics, understood the sacraments as symbols. They purely represented an outward sign of an inner reality. Blanke writes about the Zürich brethren:

In the matter of the sacraments the Anabaptists of Zollikon were the pupils of Zwingli, in so far as they understood baptism and the Lord's supper symbolically and not sacramentally.⁹⁴

In the following section we will demonstrate some of the consequences of this symbolic view of the sacraments both for the Lord's Supper and for baptism.

The Lord's Supper

Contemporary commentators vary in their interpretation of the exact meaning the Anabaptists attributed to the Lord's Supper. In this we again encounter the movement's early theological diversity. However, there are core commonalities, which we will now identify and discuss.

Firstly, the symbolic approach to the Lord's Supper made a more thorough break with the Catholic tradition than Luther had done. Fritz Blank states about the Zurich Brethren that 'they observed the Lord's Supper as a fellowship meal,'⁹⁵ which simultaneously represented their anti-clerical and anti-catholic attitude:

(For Grebel) every reminder of the Roman must be eliminated. In its place a simple Supper was to come, in which only the installation words would be read, and which would not be taken in the church but in the homes of believers, without clerical dress, with ordinary bread and ordinary drinking cups, as a symbolic meal demonstrating the fellowship of Christians with each other and with Christ (15,12-16,4).⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., pp.230f

⁹³ Ibid., 230

⁹⁴ *Brothers in Christ*, pp.356ff

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.40

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.14

Secondly, the Lord's Supper becomes a predominantly anthropocentric event, which focuses primarily on the spiritual condition of the believer. Blanke commented on the Zurich movement's understanding:

For them the Lord's (37) Supper is a symbol of the brotherhood of Christians and not an offering of the body of Christ. Baptism does not mediate the forgiveness of sins, but is a sign indicating that God has forgiven the believer.⁹⁷

Marjan Blok found similar tendencies in Menno Simons' concept of discipleship in the *Dat Fundament*, where he attributes two principal meanings to the Lord's Supper. Firstly, it is a reminder of Christ's salvific work and secondly, it has an ecclesiological focus by demonstrating the unity of the church.⁹⁸

Blok too found that the Lord's Supper has an anthropocentric rather than a salvific emphasis. Although Christ's work forms the basis, its efficacy is ultimately determined by the spiritual condition of the human partaker insofar as it 'is the state of the believer's life that determines whether the elements truly constitute the Lord's Supper.'⁹⁹

Thirdly, the Lord's Supper is not only dependent on the individual's spiritual condition. According to Bolk, for Menno Simons, it has an important ecclesiological function. Helmut Isaak states similarly that for Menno Simons the purpose of the Lord's Supper is to strengthen the unity of the saints. This automatically implies a setting of boundaries vis a vis the world:

Admission to this celebration of the supper has to be subject to certain preconditions. Whoever has not committed his life to the service of Christ and is not willing to serve his fellow-members with all his material and spiritual gifts, should not participate in the celebration of the supper because he is not a member of the body of Christ and does not belong in his church. Separation from the unbelievers and their evil deeds is the ultimate consequence of this ecclesiology. Only so the '...holy city of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord, the city of peace and the house of prayer, which is the congregation of God ...' (Fundamentenboek, p. 105) can be built, and kept clean and alive. If separation of the believers from the unbelievers is the sign of a sectarian movement, then Menno becomes a sectarian at the moment of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.¹⁰⁰

Our brief discussion of the Anabaptist understanding of the Lord's Supper indicates that it symbolises the unity of the community, their status as saints, and through it contains the main components of the divine call to be in the world but not of the world.

⁹⁷ *Brothers in Christ*, pp.356ff

⁹⁸ 'Discipleship in Menno Simon's DAT FUNDAMENT,' p.114

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ 'Menno's Vision of the Anticipation of the Kingdom of God,' p.68

Baptism

According to Snyder and others the meaning the Anabaptists attached to the public act of water baptism was that of 'an outward and visible response from those who had been inwardly called and who had freely accepted the call.'¹⁰¹

This means that firstly, as was the case with the Lord's Supper, the focus of baptism too was primarily anthropocentric; *i.e.*, although it was rooted in the divine work of redemption the main emphasis was on the disciple's act of obedience. This obedience consisted of the fact that

... one confessed one's sins before the congregation of God's people, testified to one's faith in the forgiveness of sins through Christ, and was incorporated into the fellowship of the church, accepting the fraternal responsibilities that went along with membership in the church. (349)¹⁰²

Secondly, at the act of baptism, similar to the Lord's Supper, the alien status of the believer in the world is visibly established. This was generally the case in the Anabaptist movement, but particularly evident in the case of the Zurich separatist brethren, where

... those who accepted rebaptism in the Schleithem mold also were separating themselves totally from involvement in society at large, they were establishing an alternative society, in the world but not of it.¹⁰³

Baptism, therefore, by implication had an ecclesiological function, namely that of separating the church from the world. As such it 'formed a significant visible ecclesiological boundary for all so called Anabaptists.'¹⁰⁴

Thirdly, baptism cemented the holiness status of the believer individually and corporately. While baptism represented a public witness by the candidate to the divine act of salvation in the believer's life, it signified also, if not more so, the pledge to live a changed life in the power of the Holy Spirit. Snyder illustrates this by using the example of Denck during 'his Anabaptist phase.' Denck viewed baptism as 'the sign of the Covenant.' By this he

... means that whoever is baptized into the death of Christ is baptized in order that he might die to the old Adam as (Christ) has died and that he may walk in a new life with Christ as He (Christ) was raised.'

Snyder concludes that

¹⁰¹ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.91

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.91

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.61

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.91

... here the ethical emphasis emerged as strongly in Denck's thought as in that of other Anabaptists: salvation is not dependent on "imputed righteousness" on the basis of faith in Christ alone, but rather salvation involves living a sanctified life, in the power of Christ's Spirit.¹⁰⁵

Such a symbolic interpretation of baptism demands much of the believer and emphasises correspondingly little if any divine intervention. Although, the baptismal candidates come from a point where they have acutely experienced their sinfulness in the light of divine holiness, they now expect to overcome this sinfulness by the Holy Spirit but even more so by human resolve, *i.e.* obedience.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.91

CHAPTER TWO

The Call to Discipleship

Chapter Two is based on the assumption that Christ's call to discipleship is one of two aspects of the archetypal Anabaptist divine call, the second aspect being the call to be in the world but not of it. The chapter illustrates that the distinctive Christ-centredness of the call to discipleship has as its goal for the believer to walk in the footsteps of the lowly Christ. This makes discipleship costly, because it means that the disciples, like Christ, have to take up their cross in order to follow him. For the early Anabaptists this understanding of discipleship meant that they were prepared to willingly accept the suffering that came their way in the form of persecution, often to the point of martyrdom.

Christ Centred

Discipleship played a key role in the 20th century quest for the recovery of the Anabaptist vision.¹ It was H.S. Bender who first publicly identified it as one of the central concepts of traditional Anabaptism. In the previously mentioned 1943 presidential address he cited it as one of the three pillars of the original 16th century 'Anabaptist Vision,' the others being voluntary membership of the church, and non-resisting love. In a subsequent article on 'The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship,'² published in 1950, he went on to describe discipleship as 'the most characteristic, most central, most essential and regulative concept in Anabaptist thought which largely determines all else.'³

Subsequent scholars firmly endorsed the importance of discipleship for Anabaptist faith and practice. Among them J. Lawrence Burkholder, who in his essay 'Vision of Discipleship,'⁴ published in 1957, declared it to be 'at the very heart of the movement.'⁵ Over time this view became widely accepted by Mennonite theologians to the point that by 1970 A.J. Klassen⁶ remarked:

¹ Cf. Chapter One: The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision

² BENDER Harold S. , 'The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship,' *MQR* 24, 1950, pp.25-32

³ Ibid., p.27

⁴ BURKHOLDER Lawrence J., 'The Anabaptist Vision of Discipleship,' in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, pp.135-151

⁵ Ibid., p.136

⁶ KLASSEN A.J., 'Discipleship in a Secular World,' in *Consultation on Anabaptist Mennonite Theology*, A.J. Klassen, (ed.), Coucil of Mennonite Seminaries, Fresno, Ca., 1970, pp.100-126

Critical historical scholarship is all but unanimous in understanding that the concept of radical discipleship (Nachfolge) best expresses the essence of Anabaptism.⁷

C. Arnold Snyder in his *Anabaptist History and Theology*, reiterates this view by claiming that for the Anabaptists 'the living of a life of discipleship (...) became paramount.'⁸

Substantial consensus exists not only regarding its importance but also its distinctives. We will begin our inquiry into these by first describing the general characteristics of discipleship, before investigating the underpinning theological system in more detail.

Rooted in the experience of repentance, faith and divine grace Anabaptist discipleship is defined through the relationship between the believer and Christ. As such it derives its concrete guidelines from the teaching and the life of the earthly Christ. Different commentators use varying terms to describe this particular interpretation of the Christian life in relation to Christ. Bender describes it as

... simply bringing the whole of life under the Lordship of Christ and the transformation of this life (...) after his image.⁹

The core of this definition of discipleship is practical obedience, which aims at Christ being increasingly manifested in the believer. Similarly Snyder's expectation of this relationship as 'for Christ is to be "formed" in the believer'¹⁰ Both these formulations imply or at least leave room for the disciple being divinely acted upon. However, others prefer to use terms that emphasise the copying, mimicking aspect of discipleship, where the disciple becomes the main agent.

These differences might at first glance look insignificant but, depending on their wider theological context, they may have far-reaching implications. Firstly, they are likely to determine just how much effort or 'work' is expected of the disciple in response to the call of Christ. This in turn gives the terms significant pastoral relevance. Secondly, such implications could lead to a distorted view of both the Christ who calls and of the disciple. They not only make the disciple the principal actor, but they are also reductionist insofar as they neither reflect the awe of the disciple for the divine caller that lay at the root of the early Swiss Anabaptists' experience. Neither do they reflect love for Christ, which was, as we will discuss in the following section, one of the early Anabaptists' main motives for embracing the suffering attached to the call. Thirdly, the portrayal of the divine caller as mainly a role model

⁷ Ibid., p.104

⁸ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.227

⁹ 'Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship,' p.29

¹⁰ Ibid. p.29

for the disciple minimises Christ's grace and mercy towards the disciple. Instead it is likely to burden those who take their calling to copy Christ seriously but fail to succeed.

Costly Discipleship

In keeping with the overall flavour of 16th century Anabaptism with its scrupulous tendencies and increasing literalism, their concept of discipleship is characterised by an attitude that takes very seriously Christ's *call itself*, in all its *meticulous detail*, and in its *entirety*, e.g., in its private as well as its social dimension. The term radical discipleship¹¹ is often used to highlight this approach. It contrasts with either a freer or a more internal-individualistic attitude to the call found among some other faith traditions.

This radical discipleship was reinforced through the imperative link between salvation and visible fruit. Bender re-emphasised this imperative link. In doing so he warned against the mid-20th century revivalist 'distortion' of Mennonite faith and practice. He points out that 'the essence of Anabaptism'¹²

... entails 'more than the marvelous and wholly necessary experience of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God in Christ, both for the past sinful life and for the inevitable sins of believers.'¹³

Bender warns that this experience

... is intended in God's plan of salvation to be only the initial step in Christian experience as well as the constant carrying foundation for the daily life, not the whole of the Christian experience nor even its goal.¹⁴

In addition to its serious and meticulous nature, Anabaptist discipleship not only applies to the private sphere but it is all encompassing, i.e., it is in its nature 'both personal and social.'¹⁵

These distinctives, with the underlying theological interpretation of the cross as the sanctifying cross, made Anabaptist discipleship costly, at times to the point of martyrdom.

¹¹ Radical in respect to its serious, meticulous, and all encompassing approach, not however regarding its break with the Catholic/ascetic tradition.

¹² 'The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship,' p.27

¹³ Ibid., p.28

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.29; As such it inherently contains a strong potential for socio-cultural critique, insofar, as the Anabaptists '(...) subjected not only the church but the whole social and cultural order to criticism, rejected what they found to be contrary to Christ, and attempted to put into actual practice His teachings as they understood them both ethically and sociologically.' (ibid.)

Suffering and Martyrdom

The significance of suffering in Anabaptist discipleship is clearly evident from their hymnology,¹⁶ general literature,¹⁷ and most famously, the *Martyr's Mirror*. They all bear witness to the fact that for the Anabaptists responding to the call of Christ always and distinctly includes responding to his call to take up the cross. In his article 'The Suffering Church in Anabaptism,' Cornelius Dyck points out just how deeply ingrained this correlation between suffering and discipleship is when he states that, 'it may be that the motif of suffering has become a major ingredient of Mennonite identity, past and present.'¹⁸

In fact, for the Anabaptist suffering was the mark of true discipleship. As Ethelbert Stauffer states in his article, 'The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,' They held that 'the true church of God has been a suffering church (Märtyrergemeinde) at all times'¹⁹

The nature of suffering in the Anabaptist tradition was characterised not only by its extensiveness insofar as it was viewed as a normative experience for all true disciples, but also by its intensity, which for many culminated in death through martyrdom. Although the Anabaptists, except in the case of certain unhealthy cases, did not go in search of suffering, they were not known for choosing the easy way out by trying to avoid it either. In fact their concept of suffering is that of a *passio activa*.²⁰ Alan Kreider, in his article 'The Servant is not Greater than his Master'²¹ discovered that the concept of suffering found in the *Martyr's Mirror* 'entails the voluntary acceptance of avoidable suffering, of outward suffering (...)'²² This outward nature of suffering is of particular importance to the Anabaptist concept of suffering. This theme was stressed by Bender in his critique of the notion of suffering found in other traditions such as those of Thomas à Kempis and the Pietists. Theirs is a more introspective mystic-ascetic approach where the disciple's 'suffering', and 'carrying his cross'

¹⁶For a brief description of early Anabaptist and related martyr's hymnology cf. *i.a.*, STAUFFER Ethelbert, 'The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,' *MQR* 19, 1945, pp. 179-214, pp.184f; more concise in: 'The Suffering Church in Anabaptism,' pp.6ff

¹⁷ Cf. *i.a.*, 'The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,' pp.188ff

¹⁸ 'The Suffering Church in Anabaptism,' p.5

¹⁹ 'The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,' p.187

²⁰ However, in the case of the movement's South German branch their concept of suffering started off as a mystical concept and only later developed into a theology of martyrdom. Cf. *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.77

²¹ KREIDER Alan F., "The Servant is not Greater Than his Master": the Anabaptists and the Suffering Church.' *MQR* 58, 1984, pp.5-29.

²² *Ibid.*, p.19

represents a means to 'reach the heavenly country.' Thereby disciples 'evade the conflict with the world, avoid the constructive labor of establishing the true church, and thus escape the real cross-bearing experience of true discipleship.'²³

The motives and meanings the Anabaptists assigned to such avoidable and often severe suffering are diverse, although certain main principles can be identified. They viewed suffering in both a cosmic and a personal perspective. It was inherent to the fundamental spiritual struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, in which every true disciple is involved. In this fierce conflict the cross of Christ represents the culmination from which the disciple's suffering derives its ultimate meaning. Alan Kreider also found that in the *Martyr's Mirror* the 'leitmotif' for suffering was 'conformity to Christ,' summed up in

- Gratitude for 'Christ's saving generosity in emptying himself and suffering pain and humiliation for them. How could they not suffer for him?'²⁴
- A 'sense of participating in him. As they walked in his steps, suffering for his sake, they were (in the words of Peter) being made 'partakers of his sufferings.' (1 Pet.4,13; *MM*567,643) And he, they sensed, was living and suffering in them. (...)'²⁵
- Suffering and living among them as he was, Christ would be with them as they accepted the consequences (...) of their conformity to himself - obedience. (...) Conformity to Christ led to non-conformity to the world, civil disobedience, and conflict.²⁶
- On a personal level they sensed that in their suffering God was testing and purifying them insofar as 'it has always been so, that God (...) tested them like gold in the fire.'²⁷ In this context death and suffering became 'the narrow gate,'²⁸ through which each true believer had to enter, and 'the doorway to life.'²⁹

²³ 'The Anabaptist Theology of Discipleship,' p.30f. In 'historic Lutheranism,' 'modern Fundamentalism' and 'Dispensationalism' on the other hand Bender perceives the danger that 'Justification by faith becomes so great and so wonderful, that sanctification of life and obedience to Christ, and transformation after His image, are in effect minimized and neglected.'

²⁴ 'The Servant is not Greater than his Master,' p.14

²⁵ Ibid., p.14f

²⁶ Ibid., p.15

²⁷ 'The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,' p.199

²⁸ 'The Suffering Church in Anabaptism,' p.14

²⁹ 'Anabaptists and the Suffering Church,' p.23

The central role of suffering in the Anabaptist understanding of discipleship is frequently compared with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of 'costly' discipleship.³⁰ A.J. Klassen, for example, in his treatise 'Discipleship in a Secular World,' interprets Bonhoeffer's definition of Christ's call as a call to 'come and die,' as a contemporary Lutheran equivalent of the Anabaptist understanding of discipleship.³¹

Finally, reminiscent of the practices of the early church, for the Anabaptists baptism took on the additional concrete and practical meaning of 'sealing' the baptismal candidate 'unto suffering and death.'³² Stauffer comments:

Often baptism is understood with Paul as dying with Christ. (...) Oftener, however, the martyr's death for the sake of Christ is understood as a baptism, following the word of Jesus, 'I have a baptism to be baptized with.' (Luke 12:50; Mk.10,38; Mt.20:220)³³

As a primary call of the Mennonite tradition this understanding of discipleship would consciously or subconsciously play a major role in the missionaries' understanding of their call to missions.

³⁰ Bonhoeffer was accused by some of his opponents of being a crypto-Anabaptist.

³¹ 'Discipleship in a Secular World,' pp.110f

³² 'The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,' p.207

³³ Ibid., p.205

CHAPTER THREE

The Call to be in but not of the World

Chapter Three demonstrates how the Anabaptist Christology and its corresponding anthropology, call for a life in a counter cultural *communio sanctorum*, which represents the spotless bride of Christ and is characterized by an ethic that is largely based on their virtually literal reading of the Sermon on the Mount. Only those who have truly repented and who produce visible fruit of the Spirit and follow the call of Christ belong to this community. It therefore exists separate, as a community in exile, from all political and religious bodies that are contrary to the 'true' church.

A Counter Cultural Community

The call to be in the world but not of it is strongly linked to the Anabaptist movement's ecclesiology, which separates the true church from the world. The centrality of this ecclesiology to Anabaptist faith and practice is undisputed. John H. Yoder¹ viewed it as the defining characteristic of the Zurich Anabaptists, claiming that 'the end point, which enabled the movement to become a force in history, was a view of the church.'² C. Arnold Snyder, states similarly: 'The ecclesiological dimension was central to Anabaptist theology ...'³ By implication the call to be in but not of the world is, after the call to discipleship, the movement's second primary call.

Among the 16th century reform movements that broke away from the Catholic Church it was the Anabaptists who were most keenly aware of the dichotomy between church and world. Their two-world paradigm must be seen as an ecclesiological function with the church representing the opposite of the world and *vice versa*. In this paradigm the importance of the world as a separate realm is raised in comparison to the Catholic as well as the Protestant tradition. As John H. Yoder points out in reference to the Zurich Anabaptists:

Negatively expressed, the product of the development from October 1523 to January 1525 was the Anabaptists' rejection of the Corpus Christianum. (...) Led by their simple biblicism, abetted by the opposition of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, they learned that the 'world' was just as significant a theological quantity in the sixteenth century as it had been in the first ...⁴

¹ Yoder John H., 'The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists,' in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, pp.93-104

² Ibid., p.96

³ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.90

⁴ 'The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists,' pp.96f

They rejected the ecclesiological notion of the *Corpus Christianum* as a socio-religious body where the weeds co-existed with the tares. In their opinion such an amalgam did not adequately reflect the fundamental distinction between the two realms of the church: the *Corpus Christi*, as a body of reborn and committed believers on the one hand and the world on the other. Their stark church-world dichotomy was further reinforced by the fact that for them the true church, the *Corpus Christi*, was a clearly distinguishable entity not only in the supernatural realm but also on the visible level. This inevitably put them at odds with both the religious as well as the political authorities of the day. The Anabaptists challenged the church-state alliance for its materialism, corruption and its participation in worldly power structures and wars. Instead they advocated a return to the pre-Constantinian two-world paradigm, with the church as the *Corpus Christi*, the community of re-born, committed believers, who were guided by the ethos of the Sermon on the Mount.

This strongly dualistic world-view became characteristic over time for the entire Anabaptist movement, although originally it was practised to various degrees by the different Anabaptist branches. It was, for example, a very prominent original feature of the Swiss branch's *Schleitheim Confession*, the author of which was the ex-monk Michael Sattler, while the Dutch and part of the South German movement was originally relatively more 'open' before it too increasingly adopted a separatist attitude.

Their ecclesiological notion loosely corresponds to two similar models prevalent at the time of the reformation. Firstly, we find a similar ecclesiological concept in the monastic/brotherhood tradition, which viewed the *Corpus Christi* as a separate, holy entity. Secondly, as Ernst Saxer pointed out, Luther too made provision for a similar ecclesiological concept with his notion of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.⁵ In this model the *ecclesiola* represents a voluntary body of committed, serious-minded believers, who may gather for private meetings within the wider context of the *ecclesia*, the *Volkskirche*.⁶ Importantly, both the Catholic and the Protestant form of the *Corpus Christi* remained within their mother churches. Not so with the Anabaptists, they viewed the body of the true believers as a community that is subject solely and entirely to the rule of Christ.

This ecclesiological model is referred to by Richard Niebuhr as the 'Christ against culture' model,⁷ insofar as it 'uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the

⁵ 'Die Christologie des Menno Simons im Vergleich zur Lehre der Reformatoren, insbesondere Calvins,' in *Mennonitica Helvetica*, Bulletin 20, 1997, Bern, pp.11-23

⁶ Ibid., p.22

⁷ NIEBUHR Richard H., *Christ and Culture*, Harper Colophon (ed.), 1975, first publ. by Harper and Row, New York, 1951, see in particular pp.45-76

Christian and resolutely rejects culture's claims to loyalty.⁸ In a case of conflict of interest their loyalty to Christ took precedence over all worldly concerns in the form of human culture, including organised political and religious structures. These are seen as the product of a proud a-godly and anti-godly mindset. Niebuhr traces this view of the church through history from the New Testament writings, especially the first Letter of John, through to the early church, *via* the ascetic/monastic line to Leo Tolstoy's interpretation of the concept of seeking to live under the Lordship of Christ alone. He specifically mentions the Mennonites as the purest example and one of the few groupings left of the 'many sects that arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, protesting against the worldly church, both Catholic and Protestant, and seeking to live under the Lordship of Christ alone ...'⁹

As such both the monastic/brotherhood tradition and the Anabaptist movement were anti-materialistic. There are many accounts where the monastic/brotherhood divine call included a turning from the world and its riches in order to become 'perfect.' Workman's study, though dated, still applies in this regard when he lists Anthony and St. Francis among them: 'Anthony heard the divine call: if thou wouldst be perfect, go sell all that thou hast and give to the poor (Matt. 19,21). (He was chancing to enter into a church as the Gospel for the day was being read).'¹⁰ St. Francis heard the same call.¹¹

We find similar if less radical statements of turning from worldly materialism by Anabaptists at the time of their conversion.¹² However, for the Anabaptists 'poverty' did not have the same meritorious connotation as it did for the true ascetics, and in contrast to the true ascetics the Anabaptists strongly affirmed marriage and family life.

Modern Anabaptist historiography stresses the similarity between the Anabaptist church-world dualism and the monastic tradition. This notion had been put forward by George H. Williams already, who claimed that 'Anabaptist theology has got prereformation roots. (...) Its asceticism was a legacy of the monastic movement, where there existed a tradition of preaching against the world.'¹³

In addition, Workman points out that originally monasticism did have a similar laicizing thrust as was the case with the Anabaptists: 'Monasticism in its origin was the protest of the lay

⁸ *Christ and Culture*, p.45

⁹ NIEBUHR Richard H., *Christ and Culture*, Harper Colophon (ed.), 1975, p.56

¹⁰ WORKMAN Herbert B., *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, Beacon Press, Epworth Press, London, p.93

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cf. for example Menno Simon's Hymn of Discipleship, where he stated: '(W)hen I turned me to the Lord, (I) gave the world a farewell look.' (*CWMS*, p.1063)

¹³ *The Radical Reformation*, p.834

spirit against any conception of religion which excluded the laity from the highest obligations or the supremest attainment.¹⁴

In Egypt, for example, monks and bishops, who were accused of 'vainglory',¹⁵ were generally found on opposite sides.¹⁶ The early monks were in their large majority laymen, of whom some were ordained by force and against their will to satisfy the admiration of people.¹⁷ Workman illustrates this by using the famous statement: 'If you desire to escape troubles don't leave the desert, for in the desert nobody can ordain you a bishop.'¹⁸

The monastic/brotherhood movement was further characterised by their preaching of repentance. We find a similar emphasis in the early Anabaptist movement.

True Repentance

It was 'true' repentance that marked the transference of the individual's citizenship from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of heaven. True repentance was characterised by accompanying visible fruit. According to Helmut Isaak, Menno Simons describes true repentance as

... not the penance which is practiced in the Catholic Church, but the repentance of John the Baptist which produces genuine fruits of repentance and leads to new life.¹⁹

Sjouke Voolstra makes the link between Menno Simon's understanding of true repentance and the Erasmian, humanist tradition.²⁰

Fritz Blanke calls the Anabaptists' distinctive understanding of repentance 'the theological motive of the movement.'²¹ As we noted in the chapter on discipleship, such repentance comes about as a result of the encounter between human sinfulness and divine holiness, which biblically and often marks the beginning of a divine call.²² Once the Anabaptist believers had

¹⁴ *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, p.13

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.15

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.18

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.20

¹⁹ 'Menno's Vision of the Anticipation of the Kingdom of God in his Early Writings,' p.65f

²⁰ VOOLSTRA Sjouke, 'True Penitence: The Core of Menno Simon's Theology,' *MQR* 62, 1988, p. 390

²¹ *Brothers in Christ*, p.35f

²² Cf. *i.a.*, Ex. 3, 1ff: Moses and the Burning Bush; Jer. 1ff: the Call of Jeremiah; Acts 9ff: the Call of Saul/Paul. The New Dictionary of Theology: 'In traditional Christian usage, vocation refers to a divine

repented and found assurance of forgiveness, they embarked on a 'new life' that focussed on internal and external holiness and love.

Such a forsaking of the old life and embarking on a new one is closely linked with the Anabaptist understanding of the divine call. This is illustrated by Irvin B. Horst's analysis of Menno's understanding of his personal call as 'forsak(ing) his former way of life.'²³

A look at these first expressions of a changed life offer no doubt the best cue to what happened when in 1536 he laid down his priestly office, forsook his former way of life, and 'willingly submitted to distress and poverty under the heavy cross of Christ.' (...) he spoke of 'my illumination, conversion and calling'(...)²⁴

For Menno the new life to which repentance is the gateway is implicitly rooted in the kingdom of God and its limited earthly representation, the community of believers. As Horst comments:

The new man (...) cannot live in isolation. As a man in Christ he finds his identity and fulfilment in the body of Christ, that is the community. In this view the community is seen as an extension of the new man.²⁵

In the following section we will investigate some of the consequences of true repentance for life in the Anabaptist faith community.

Bride without Spot or Wrinkle

The New Testament image of the church as the bride 'without spot or wrinkle' (Eph.5,25-27) appears prominently in the Anabaptist writings. It is indicative of their interpretation of the church as the *communio sanctorum*. Their understanding of holiness was partly forensic but just as much if not more so it referred to the concrete, practical, personal and visible aspect of the sanctification process.

call to undertake a particular activity or embrace a particular "stage of life" on behalf of God or the community.' (The New Dictionary of Theology, Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (eds.), The New Dictionary of Theology, Gill and Macmillan, Gill and Macmillan Ltd, Goldenbridge Dublin 8, 1987, p.1087)

²³ HORST Irvin B., 'Menno Simons : The New Man in Community,' Essay 16., in , *Profiles of Radical Reformers, Biographical Sketches from Thomas Muntzer to Paracelsus*, Goertz Hans-Jurgen, Klaassen Walter, (eds.) engl. Edition, Herald Press, Kitchener, Ontario, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1982

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 205; The term 'new man' was frequently used by Menno.

In contrast to the Catholic concept of the *corpus Christi*, which only referred to the monastic/brotherhood elite, the Anabaptists applied it as a lay concept to every church member. This meant that every true member of the church had to have experienced true repentance, spiritual re-birth and an embarkment on a life of inner and outer sanctification. In the words of C. Arnold Snyder, 'the biblical model of "Christian Community" was the community of yielded, regenerated, faithful, baptized, committed and obedient believers – a "community of saints."²⁶

As such the spiritual condition of the Christian community played a pivotal role in the thinking of Anabaptist leaders, and particularly of Menno:

In his writings but also in his work on the brotherhood Menno was intensely preoccupied with the community as the bride of Christ. He envisioned the community as a chaste virgin to be presented to the one husband Christ (2 Corinthians 11,2).²⁷

The ban was an important corollary to the *communion sanctorum*. According to Snyder it was one of at least four 'universally Anabaptist' 'marks' of the 'visible community',²⁸ the other three being baptism, the Lord's Supper and mutual aid.

It served to safe-guard the church's holiness, and presupposes the church's power to bind and to loose based on Matt. 18, 18. The pivotal role of the ban and by implication of the integrity of church's holiness is illustrated by the vigour with which it was defended during inter-denominational disputes. According to Snyder,

.... in later discussions between Reformers and Anabaptists, the question of the ban often was a more difficult point of negotiation than was adult baptism. (insert FN) Anabaptists sometimes were willing to grant that baptism could be left 'free' (that is, they would be willing not to require adult baptism), but they found it harder to countenance a church without discipline.²⁹

Important from a pastoral perspective is the issue that in such a discipline orientated community faith can easily be reduced to a predominantly moral and behavioural codex, which does not adequately provide for such core human problems as guilt and shame experienced by those who had 'slipped up.' Snyder suggests that the ban might address these issues by providing for 'confession and absolution':

²⁶ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.90

²⁷ 'The New Man in Community,' pp.211f

²⁸ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.91

²⁹ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.177

In many ways the ban in Anabaptism took the place of the Roman Catholic rite of confession and absolution, providing a context for the 'loosing' of the penalty for sin by the church.³⁰

This mechanism does not however adequately cater for the problem of everyday sin not covered by the ban, but which is more likely to have been on the mind of ordinary Anabaptists. This lack of a defined vehicle for confession and absolution combined with a great emphasis on internal and external holiness provides a fertile breeding ground for a perceived need to cover up one's sins out of a sense of shame.³¹

However, the Anabaptist view of the Christian community was not only that of a community of saints but, according to C. Arnold Snyder, also a community of worship, love and of mutual aid.³² Irvin B. Horst, similarly comments on the Dutch Anabaptists:

The idea of the Christian community as a fellowship of covenanted Christians is common to all groups of Dutch Anabaptists. When Menno left the official church in 1536 the government in Friesland reported that he had gone over to 'the covenant of the Anabaptists.' While the name refers specifically to baptism, it also indicates the closeknit character of the Anabaptist brotherhood.³³

This close bond had two important consequences for members. Firstly, it provided them with a church-internal safety net where the members took care of each other spiritually, emotionally and economically.

We will now turn our attention to the implication of the church as the *communio sanctorum* for its position in the socio-religious environment.

Free Church

The turning away from the world by those who were called to a holy life meant on the one hand the rejection of materialism and of the religio-political culture and power structures. On the other hand, it resulted in a re-orientation of the believer towards the *ἐκκλησία*, which similarly to the monastery in the monastic movement emerged as a para-national and a para-geographical entity. Such a re-orientation towards a particular community is commonly observed in groups with an outsider status either through voluntary withdrawal or because

³⁰ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.92

³¹ Cf. the characteristics of a shame orientated society according to David Augsburger's definition in (AUGSBURGER David W., *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pa., 1976, pp.111-143)

³² Cf. *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.91

³³ 'The New Man in Community,' p. 211

society excludes them. In such cases the community, which forms a cultural and often also a geographical 'ex-clave' serves as the new social reference-point. Paul Tabori in his study of such exile-sites within the Jewish community as one example of this phenomenon, observes:

In some countries - as in Russia and Poland and a certain extent, Romania - Jews were so rigorously excluded from cultural life, from educational possibilities, that their intellectual and emotional loyalties were to the ghetto, to the tightly-knit community and not to the geographical and natural framework of their centuries-old homelands.³⁴

For many such alienated communities the ideas of nation as well as of geographical boundaries lost their importance. This was also true for the Anabaptists. In the words of G.H. Williams: 'In contrast to the Protestants, the exponents of the Radical Reformation believed on principle in the separation of their own churches from the national or territorial state ...'³⁵

Workman further points out that the early monks had assumed a similar position vis a vis church and state:

To the monks, at any rate in their earlier enthusiasm, nationalism made no appeal. They were anxious to leave State and Church behind them, to flee beyond their bounds, not to develop their powers.³⁶

The monastics made an even more radical break with the world than the Anabaptists, who on the whole were usually content to remain part of society as far as their consciences and society itself allowed. The monks on the other hand voluntarily and concretely exiled themselves initially by fleeing into the desert and later by erecting monastery walls around their distinctive εκκλησιαι, while the Irish-Scottish missionary movement used voluntary exile to loosen their earthly roots, often giving it a penitential undertone.

Their desire to sever worldly ties sometimes assumed clearly unhealthy undertones. The following quote by Jerome, born 346 AD at Stridon in Dalmatia represents such an example of a starkly anti-social understanding of natural human relationships. He claimed that 'the love of God and the fear of hell will easily break such bonds, ' for the 'battering-ram of natural affection will recoil powerless from the wall of the Gospel.'³⁷

³⁴ TABORI Paul, *The Anatomy of Exile, A Semantic and Historical Study*, Harrap, London, 1972 , p.152

³⁵ *The Radical Reformation*, pp.XXIVf

³⁶ *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, p.168

³⁷ Jerome, Ep. (14) 3, quoted in *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, p.119

On the positive side, as Workman points out,³⁸ their turning from the world invested the monastic movement with a strong cosmopolitan quality. This was true for the early individual monks, and remained one of their collective marks even as they began to organise themselves in para-statal, structured communities and as, under Benedict, the monastic movement began to espouse *stabilitas loci*. They were beholden first to their monasteries, which formed 'a state within a state.' In this way they retained what Workman calls their 'ecclesiastical internationalism whose head centre, under the subtle guidance of the papacy was Rome.'³⁹

A Call to Exile

The cosmopolitan trait of the monastic tradition was similarly present in the Anabaptist tradition. It underpinned their unsettled life. On the one hand it facilitated their repeated forced relocations into exile on account of their beliefs. It underpinned the roaming life style of their itinerant missionaries. Their low regard for national, geographical and material ties is further reminiscent of the pilgrim status of God's people both in the Old and New Testament. In fact the Anabaptists appropriated for themselves Yahweh's call to Abraham to trust in God and 'go,' as J.Lawrence Burkholder notes:

They saw themselves in the line of Abraham, who 'went out not knowing whither he went.' They accepted as normative the 'insecurity' of faith with Jesus who had no place to lay His head and with the disciples who were called upon to 'take no thought for the morrow.'⁴⁰

The 20th century mainstream Protestant Dietrich Bonhoeffer 're-discovered' this notion of 'alienation,' that is traditionally coupled with the biblical concept of the divine call. His biographer, Eberhard Bethge, observed: 'Alienation is connected in the Bible with the concept

³⁸ *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, p.168

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ 'Vision of Discipleship' p.139; We find a similar concept of journeying towards the heavenly home in the monastic literature. Workman cites the fact that in the 'nomadic Celtic culture'⁴⁰ the 'typical hero in song of monk Brendan of Clonfert, (+577), describes him as one 'who crossed the ocean "through a thick fog" that he might find an earthly paradise "beyond which shone an eternal clearness. (*The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, p.196); Cf. also: 'And finally, (Bonhoeffer's) theological thinking in the two years preceding 1933 had already begun to incorporate the exilic element in Christian faith, the alienation of discipleship. He began, therefore, not with Paul's Letter to the Romans, as Protestant renewals usually do, but rather with the Sermon on the Mount, which negates any fixation with a homeland.' (BETHGE Eberhard, (ed.), with Essay by John W. De Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1975, p.105)

of 'being called'. God calls to exile and to new shores.⁴¹ Such alienation is costly, though, for those who answer the call: 'The price of exile is high. The new status cannot be taken for granted for it entails going through suffering.'⁴²

At the core of this pain lies the fact that the call singles out the recipients and alienates them from the others, leading them into 'aloneness':

Through the call of Jesus men become individuals (...) But men are frightened of solitude, and they try to protect themselves from it by merging themselves in the society of their fellow-men and in their material environment.⁴³

Unfortunately, not many investigations have been conducted into the emotional toll their exile experiences took on those of the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition and on similar movements. Mostly they are portrayed as heroes as is the case in much of Anabaptist/Mennonite historiography. Burkholder for example comments on the itinerant Anabaptist missionaries:

One significant implication of the Great Commission is the conception of the Christian calling or 'vocation' according to which all cultural aims are subordinated to the missionary task. All concerns of life such as family, occupation, guild, education, political responsibility, all the elements of civilization to which men give themselves, are either subordinated or eliminated. (...) The natural demands of home and occupation were frequently regarded as 'worldly concerns'. (...) Many references in Anabaptist literature speak of long periods of separation between husband and wife and, of course, severe persecution added to the anxiety of family responsibility.⁴⁴

He typically concludes: 'Seldom in history has the issue of security been so heroically faced.'⁴⁵

From a pastoral perspective such an evaluation of Anabaptist exile experiences as a heroic act is too one-dimensional and does not do justice to its potentially deeply painful aspects. Part of the purpose of our study is to take a more realistic look at this phenomenon in our case study.

⁴¹ *Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr*, p.114

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.115

⁴³ BONHOEFFER Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship*, complete ed, eng.translation SCM Press Ltd. 1959, 10th impression 1978, Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk, p.824

⁴⁴ 'Vision of Discipleship,' p.138f

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.139

CHAPTER FOUR

The Call for Women to Follow

This chapter investigates the effect of the divine call on Anabaptist/Mennonite women both in the early era of the movement and again during the period of the modern missionary movement. In the first part the chapter shows how the distinctive early Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of the divine call, based on direct pneumatic intervention, had a dynamic, liberating effect on the women recipients. In their family lives it afforded them a relatively important role, as they were in many ways seen as equals by their spouses in witness and in suffering. Through their own calling they had become 'spiritual companions'¹ of their husbands in dangerous times. Through their direct personal call, and based on the priesthood of believers, they were also seen to make an important contribution to the church community. Although generally they were never recognised as equals in church governance, in the early days some of them acted as prophetic leaders, and in some cases substituted where no suitable man was available. In spite of their relatively important role, Anabaptism women remained beholden to the increasingly restrictive rules of their communities, which among other things expected of the women self-less caring and supporting of others, concepts that embodied in the call to discipleship. As part of the overall shift of Anabaptism/Mennonitism from the Spirit to the letter, the women's call became increasingly restrictively defined by the obligations of Anabaptist/Mennonite discipleship

The second part the chapter shows how, during the modern mission era women again found new avenues for ministry that had been closed for them in their home congregations. However, the role that was assigned to women, and which women disciples often assigned to themselves, was often orientated towards a ministry defined by human relationships and the service and care for others. In this scenario the danger existed that they remain bound by socio-religious obligations and the needs of others, rather than being freed up to follow the divine call itself.

Women caught in the Tension between the Inner and the Outer

Women and Family

Did the Anabaptist understanding of the divine call fundamentally affect the women's standing in the Anabaptist community and in the more intimate sphere of their families? The answer depends on certain critical variables, which are largely determined by the degree to

¹ The term is used by Jennifer Hiatt Umble. Cf. Umble Hiatt Jennifer, 'Spiritual Companions: Women as Wives in the Martyr's Mirror,' *Mennonite Life*, Sept. 1990, pp.32-35

which the community acknowledged the non-gender specific concept of the direct empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The degree to which the churches practiced the spiritual gifts depended on the Anabaptist branches, and on the time period.

The *Martyrs' Mirror* provides many indicators of the impact of the call on early Anabaptist women as far as their family relationships, and their role in church and society is concerned. It shows that in both spheres they had a relatively important status. According to John Klassen,²

*(t)he records of the Martyrs' Mirror show, that women were active members within the Anabaptist community and were capable of expressing their faith both in personal terms and in terms of doctrine.*³

Anabaptist women were called to follow Christ as much as their male counterparts in witnessing and also in suffering, and as a result they had a strong impact on the movement as a whole. In the words of C. Arnold Snyder, 'women played a central role in the spread and the survival of the movement.'⁴ Many made their contribution in a personal, non-official form, based on the priesthood of believers. This is evident from letters contained in the *Martyr's Mirror*.⁵ Jennifer Hiet Umble established that 29 letters were written by men to women, mostly their spouses.⁶ The content of these letters indicates that in times of persecution women fulfilled an important spiritual ministry towards their persecuted fellow believers, by supporting and encouraging their believing husbands and other brothers and sisters in the faith. Their incarcerated spouses relied on their support, by drawing on them as 'spiritual companions,'⁷ addressing them as 'sisters in the Lord.'⁸ By using this term 'these men acknowledged 'a degree of spiritual equality for female believers.'⁹ Jennifer Hiett Umble further points out that this spiritual support was also critical in the case of the wives of

² KLASSEN John, 'Women and the Family Among Dutch Anabaptist Martyrs,' *MQR* 60, 1986, pp. 548-571

³ Ibid., p.571

⁴SNYDER C. Arnold, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction*, Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ont., 1995, p.4

⁵ According Klassen 28,6% of those identified by gender in the *Martyr's Mirror* were women. ('Women and the Family Among Dutch Anabaptist Martyrs,' p.549)

⁶ 'Spiritual Companions,' p.32

⁷ Ibid., p.32

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p.34

congregational leaders.¹⁰ Anabaptist marriages were however not only defined through their spiritual aspects. Hielt Umble refers to many instances where husbands used respectful, grateful and intimate terms of endearment to address their wives.¹¹

The women's involvement with imprisoned Anabaptist believers sometimes cost them their lives, but many of them actively¹² chose to suffer rather than to deny their personal calling, because they accepted suffering as a requirement of true discipleship.¹³ In this context, Hielt Umble questions if on a deeper level they really chose freely to suffer rather than to compromise, and if their choice was not rather passive, because they believed that ultimately their fate was not in their hands, but it was God who determined their destiny.¹⁴ Nevertheless Keith L. Sprunger¹⁵ comments that in those early days, 'Anabaptist women were called upon by the church for extraordinary deeds.'¹⁶

Based on their personal divine call, early Anabaptist women also made significant choices in their ordinary family life, where some of them were faced with the decision either to join the Anabaptist movement or to continue to live life with an unbelieving husband. In such cases the divine call and their marriage to their heavenly spouse had priority over human ties. This left the believing spouse free to choose a divorce. This was true for all Anabaptist branches. Pointing out the similarity between this view of the marriage vows and the monastic vows, Snyder refers to 'the "ascetic" substratum (in) all Anabaptist thinking about marriage that marks it as Anabaptist and nothing else.'¹⁷ Based on this understanding that the divine call overrides all natural relationship, the parent - child bond too was secondary to the bond between the parents and Christ, although, there is 'a great deal of evidence of parental love among the Anabaptists.'¹⁸ In this context Klassen quotes the example of one mother who rather gave away the child she was nursing to a wet nurse, than to recant. It is telling though, that this did cause her the greatest sorrow of all.¹⁹

¹⁰ Cf. 'Spiritual Companions, pp.32f

¹¹ Ibid., p.33

¹² Cf. *i.a.* HIET UMBLE Jenifer, 'Women and Choice: An Example of the Martyr's Mirror' *MQR* LXIV, 1990, pp.135-145, p.137

¹³ 'Women and Choice' p.140

¹⁴ Ibid.,p.144

¹⁵ SPRUNGER Keith, 'God's Powerful Army of the Weak: Anabaptist Women of the Radical Reformation,' in *Triumph over Silence, Women in Protestant History*, Richard L. Greaves, (ed.), Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1985, pp.45-74

¹⁶ Ibid., p.74

¹⁷ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.292

¹⁸ 'Women and the Family among Dutch Anabaptist Martyrs,' p.565

¹⁹ Cf. Ibid., p.566

Over time the relatively great freedom of choice that this practice, where spouses began to be chosen according to spiritual principles²⁰ afforded women, began to restrict, and the dynamic impact of the divine call on marriage became more static. According to Snyder the practice of leaving unbelieving partners for the sake of the call of Christ 'was replaced by obedience to community norms.'²¹ These largely reflected the customs of the wider society, and were theologically underpinned by the congregation's interpretation of the Pauline teachings.²²

Such a considerably more restrictive family life was practiced in the highly structured Hutterite community. Packull describes this form of community interaction as fitting into the patriarchal society of the time, with the shared 'traditional virtues of chastity, modesty, humility, reticence and piety,'²³ and with a similar high regard for 'hard work, and frugality.'²⁴ Within the Hutterite society, the women's role and place were determined not primarily by her personal call but by the overall system which they compared to the functioning of a 'beehive or an ingenious clockwork.'²⁵ John Klassen similarly describes the Dutch Anabaptist community as one that 'accepted the patriarchal views of society, in which the male dominated the female and the children obeyed.'²⁶ However, he also points out that 'The Anabaptists did not have a unified stance on questions of and the nature of the family.'²⁷

Women's Formal Ministry in the Church

The relatively important informal status of women in early Anabaptism life also applied to their formal role in the church. On the whole the same rule that had applied in matters of family and marriage also applied in the context of the church: The greater the openness of the community to the direct pneumatic influence, the more significant the role of the women. Or use C. Arnold Snyder's terminology, the inner-outer tension, which underpinned Anabaptist faith and practice and their understanding of the divine call also affected the development of the status of women in the congregation. In the early days, where direct pneumatic intervention was a critical feature of all Anabaptist religious life, the women's

²⁰ Cf. 'Spiritual Companions,' p.32

²¹ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.292

²² Cf. *ibid.* This is confirmed by Jennifer Hiatt Umble, who writes, '... the attitudes of Anabaptist men toward the religious and marital status of Anabaptist women do not seem to differ radically from the sixteenth century norm. ('Spiritual Companions,' p.33)

²³ 'We are Born to Work like the Birds to Fly,' p.86

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.85

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.549

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.550

contribution was to some degree that of an equal. As the movement became more organised and formalised this trend was reversed.

(The emphasis on the *Spirit* of God working within the individual believer) opened wider leadership possibilities for women because 'the Spirit bloweth where it listeth;' while (emphasis on the Word) limited leadership possibilities for women by appealing to community standards (which tended to mirror societal norms) and Pauline restrictions.²⁸

The personal pneumatic calling and empowerment introduced important elements of liberation into the socio-religious life of women, even if it did not bring about full gender equality as such. What it did was to, 're-establish(..) the proper, biblical divine "order," with God as Lord over all.'²⁹ In practical terms this meant that, '(o)bedience to God was the first step, but it was followed by the requirement of obedience to the Body of Christ on earth, the church.'³⁰ This was clearly evident in the way Anabaptist congregations were led. Although there are no records that for example in the Zollikon congregation women were administering the sacraments/symbols,³¹ there was a time when even in that congregation, which was from the start relatively letter-bound, a woman, Margret Hottinger, acted as a prophetic leader. Other women too were known to practice a prophetic leadership role to various degrees among the Zürich and St. Gall Swiss Brethren and in other early Anabaptist branches. They also seemed to play an active part in church discipline, including in the discipline of male church leaders.³² Under Hubmaier's leadership women were also excluded from official leadership roles. Snyder mentions another exception, namely where men proved to be too weak to fulfil that role fearlessly.³³ By implication, in the more mystically inclined branches of Tirol and Moravia women played a more prominent role, both in the court records, as lay leaders, lay missionaries and martyrs.³⁴

The overall tendency within the Anabaptist movement, over time, to increasingly emphasise the Word over the Spirit, explains that, according to Werner O. Packull, 'the economic-social space allotted to women constricted during the sixteenth and seventeenth

²⁸ *Anabaptist History and Theology*, p.253

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p.254

³² Ibid., p.258

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p.259

centuries, (...)'³⁵ Menno Simons had already abolished the office of prophet, for both males and females, mainly in response to the spiritualist aberrations of his days. This closed the door to the one acknowledged official leadership role that had been open to women in Anabaptist congregations. During the following period women's leadership roles were largely restricted to informal positions, and notably also to hymn writing. According to Keith L. Sprunger the volume of hymn writing was 'sometimes sufficient for a collection or even a full hymnbook.'³⁶ In the Dordrecht Confession of 1632, however, the office of deaconess was explicitly included. The duties of a deaconess were described as follows:

And that also honorable aged widows should be chosen and ordained deaconesses, that they with the deacons may visit, comfort, and care for, the poor, feeble, sick, sorrowing and needy, as also the widows and orphans and assist in attending to other wants and necessities of the church to the best of their ability. (1 Tim. 5:9, Rom 16:1; James 1:27)

Sprunger points out that in later developments in the nineteenth century, and pioneered by some Dutch congregations, Anabaptist/Mennonite women gained a more official voice, by being afforded the right to vote. Later, in 1905 Dutch women 'served on church boards (...) and about the same time women began preaching occasionally from Dutch pulpits.'³⁷

In conclusion, our investigation into the role and status of the early Anabaptist woman, both in their family and in the church sphere, leaves us with an ambivalent picture. The distinctive Anabaptist understanding of the sense of call as a direct personal pneumatic intervention, which was present to various degrees in all early congregations, provided her hand with a measure of equality with her male counterparts. This applied especially to the areas of witnessing and suffering and informal ministry, and to some degree to more formal leadership roles in the church through prophecy, and through the joint witness with their husbands. The pneumatic phase of the movement lasted for varying periods in the different branches. Even during that time however, the women's role and status were largely defined by the restrictive norms of society. This became increasingly the case through ever more rigid congregational obligations imposed on women, which were largely due to the overall shift from the inner to the outer of second generation Anabaptism.

The Modern Call to Serve

³⁵ PAKULL Werner O., "We are Born to Work like the Birds to Fly: The Anabaptist-Hutterite Ideal Woman," *MQR* 73:1, 1999, pp 75-86, p.75

³⁶ God's Powerful Army of the Weak: Anabaptist Women of the Radical Reformation,' p.56

³⁷ Ibid.' p.56

It was largely through the modern missionary call, which importantly grew out of a spiritual renewal, that Anabaptist/Mennonite women again found unique, meaningful, and innovative avenues for ministry, many aspects of which were habitually closed to them in their home congregations. However, Anne White³⁸ reminds us that early 19th century female missionaries were in many ways viewed as mere assistants to male missionaries.³⁹ In this context Fiona Bowie⁴⁰ writes of the 'invisibility' of the early women missionaries.⁴¹ It stands to reason that those women who did not feel part of their husband's sense of call were even more invisible than their actively involved counterparts. This notion of the invisible missionary reminds us of the shadowy existence of the missionary wife in the *Poisonwood Bible*. Involuntarily she had been incorporated into her husband's missionary call but she never assumed an active part in it, at least not in any way that he would have appreciated. Instead she did what she had to do on her own, unnoticed by her driven spouse. Yet she was insightful and effective in her own way, in many aspects much more so than her husband who had the call.

To return to the early female missionaries in general, White remarks that although their contributions were vastly underappreciated and underreported in mission historiography, through the missionary call, "woman's sphere" became the world for them.⁴² Their newfound scope for ministry moved them from the mundane to a world of risk and innovation. In the words of Juhnke,

The missionary movement was on the cutting edge of social reform, and out on that edge were new opportunities for women.⁴³

Similarly Wilbert R. Shenk points out that,⁴⁴

³⁸ WHITE Ann, 'Counting the Cost of Faith: America's Early Female Missionaries, *Church History*, Vol. 57, 1988, pp. 19-30

³⁹ Ibid., p.30

⁴⁰ BOWIE Fiona, 'Introduction: Reclaiming Women's Presence,' in *Women and Missions: Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener, (eds.), Berg, Providence/Oxford, 1993, pp.1-19

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 2

⁴² 'Counting the Cost of Faith: America's Early Female Missionaries,' p.30

⁴³ *A People of Mission*, p. ... As examples Juhnke mentions that 'Single women were in charge of forty evangelical boards of missions in 1910. The Union Missionary Training Center in Brooklyn, where many early Mennonite missionaries went for preparation, was founded by a woman.' (*A People of Mission*, p.67)

⁴⁴ Cf. also Sharon Klingelsmith's description of critical work done at the mission home front by the Women's Missionary Societies. 'Women in the Mennonite Church,' p163

Where people managed to hold in tension inward piety and outward concern for the world, (...) renewal movements became engines of wide-ranging innovation, the modern mission movement 'with its strong women's ministry being one of the most evident fruits.'⁴⁵

As had been the case in the early Anabaptist movement the personal divine call had a limited equalising effect for women. Adrian Hastings⁴⁶ observations on the missionaries' gender equalising impact on the mission field also applies to the women missionaries themselves: Their Gospel call was an equalising factor, because through it '(w)omen and men shared the same beliefs, the same fears, the same sense of right and wrong.'⁴⁷ Dana Robert also points out that according to her research into American women in mission,⁴⁸ the motivation for mission of the early 19th century Protestant American women missionaries was the same as that of their husbands:⁴⁹ 'Missionary wives shared with their husbands the view that, without the God found through Jesus Christ, the souls of humanity would not obtain eternal life.'⁵⁰ She further mentions as additional motivating factors love for God and Christ, disinterested benevolence, typical American optimism, the wish to serve as co-worker with God, and the desire to glorify God.⁵¹ What did distinguish the motivation of these early female missionaries from that of their male counterparts, however, was a 'desire for usefulness, concern for women and children, and the necessity of serving their husbands.'⁵² These concerns put women's ministry from the start under additional emotional and physical strain. This posed a challenge particularly to missionary women with their own families. Firstly, they shared with their husbands the burden for souls, secondly they laboured for their mission congregants' practical and physical wellbeing and development, and thirdly they responded to their families' needs, which the community expected them to address, but which was ultimately rooted in their own strong instinct. In practical terms the latter could mean that as family women, they had to grapple with the considerable and often emotionally and physically draining odds of converting

⁴⁵ SHENK Wilbert R., in Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice*, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1997 reprinted 1998, p.X

⁴⁶ HASTINGS Adrian, 'Were Women a Special Case?,' in *Women and Missions: Past and Present, Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, pp.109-125

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.109

⁴⁸ ROBERT Dana, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice*, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1997, reprinted 1998

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.27

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.25

⁵¹ Ibid., p.31

⁵² Ibid., p.37

'a series of simple houses into homes,'⁵³ keeping their families fed, clothed, healthy and the younger children educated.⁵⁴ This challenging multifaceted engagement at the home front they had to attempt to combine with their official mission engagement.⁵⁵ This was expected of them by the mission organisation but it was also close to their heart, and very much part of their sense of calling. What was true from a missionary perspective, namely that 'most women could select only a portion for their mission, but would feel the burden of inadequacy for the whole,'⁵⁶ more often than not also applied to her role as a wife and mother.

In contrast to the single women, whose ministry was at least superficially more independent, and partly due to the fact that missionary assignments were primarily geared towards the husbands, married women sometimes lacked a strong sense of her personal self. Bertsche makes the following observation in this regard:

Perhaps the greatest challenge of all for the missionary wife and mother was to find her own identity in the mission world of which she was a part. Across mission history, placement of missionary couples had been largely determined by the training and gifts of the men. *CIM/AIMM* was no exception. Thus it was that a high percentage of the time, missionary wives followed their husbands from one post to another and from one assignment to the next. (...) on the whole missionary wives lived and served in a male oriented landscape.⁵⁷

Bertsche indicates that what kept most married women from falling into a permanently negative attitude because of this and other gender related burdens was primarily the common sense of call that many had developed together with their husbands. This enabled a couple, or should we say the wives, to 'super-centre' in the Tournier sense beyond their respective interests on a higher purpose:

With the conviction that God called and led them to Africa as couples, the details of the assignment for either spouse were not of first importance. Their ongoing presence and ministry, together, in a land to which they believed God had led them, was their overarching concern.⁵⁸

⁵³ *CIM/AIMM A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, p. 687

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.687f

⁵⁵ Especially in the early days of American Protestant mission history this usually was a teaching or a medical ministry, and in some rare cases an evangelistic ministry. *American Women in Mission*, pp.160-169, *et al.*

⁵⁶ *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought*, p.3

⁵⁷ *CIM/AIMM A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, p.688

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.688

What Bertsche wrote of missionaries in general, applied also to the women, namely that in all the very real suffering they had to endure because of their missionary call, their perception that they were part of the meta-story, the 'overarching concern' largely kept them from falling into victim mode. Their overall focus kept returning to the fact that,

(t)o serve in an area and among a people to which they believe God has led them and to witness the transforming impact of God's grace in the lives of people around them affords a profound sense of fulfilment.⁵⁹

If we turn our attention to the single women, who overall made up approximately 20% of *CIM/AIMM* missionaries,⁶⁰ we find that they were vulnerable not only because of their gender but also because of their marital status. In the early days of the modern mission movement they were not only seen together with their married colleagues as second-class missionaries but they were originally only sent out reluctantly and were obliged to rely on married households for their support and living arrangements.⁶¹ Over time, single women became an accepted and valued part of the mission endeavour, and learned to also rely on each other. But they always had to make an extra effort to become embedded in supportive and nurturing relationships that would help them cope with the manifold missionary demands on the mission field. Bertsche refers to this subject from a male perspective when he writes,

The lot of single women missionaries has never been a simple or easy one. For many, their assignments have taken them into the isolation of the bush stations. Though usually situated with missionary couples and families who have sought to be supportive and helpful, there inevitably come those times, at the end of the day, when in the solitude of their own living quarters, they are cast upon their own resources to hold loneliness at bay.⁶²

In addition, great flexibility was expected from single missionaries.⁶³ As example Bertsche firstly mentions their living arrangements, which often required them to share a household with whatever other single happened to be looking for a house mate. Secondly, with regards to their deployment, this was often based on the assumption that moving would be easier for them than for their married counter parts. Thirdly, they had to negotiate their position between

⁵⁹ *CIM/AIMM A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, p.691

⁶⁰ For statistics on Mennonite single missionaries cf. 'Mennonite Single Women in International Mission,' in *Mission Focus*, March 1991, Vol.19, No. 1 pp. 5-6

⁶¹ SAUDER Ruth, 'Mennonite Single Women in International Mission – A History,' in *Mission Focus*, March 1991, Vol.19, No. 1, pp.4-14. p.4

⁶² *CIM/AIMM: A story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, p.685

home culture and mission culture single-handedly.⁶⁴ Sarah Burkholder then also mentions that 'returning missionaries listed spouses, friends and relatives, in that order, as being the most helpful to them on returning to North America.'⁶⁵ Clearly the unmarried woman has to substitute the married woman's primary support in her re-entry experience.

The single woman usually had a stronger sense of identity than her married counterpart. Unlike the married women, who sometimes followed their husband's call, singles usually entered missions 'with a deep certainty of God's leading in their lives.'⁶⁶ They usually 'also have come at peace with themselves about their single state as they applied for service, believing that in God's purpose from them there was a place and ministry which they and they alone could fulfil.'⁶⁷ However this might not be applicable to every single missionary, common sense tells us that many of the unmarried women at the point of applying for missionary service have indeed 'dealt' with important aspects of their single status, and developed a heightened sense of their personal identity. This is likely to have had a liberating effect on them, setting free additional energies for their missionary challenges.

Renee Sauder conducted a study on women in pastoral ministry.⁶⁸ In her investigation into the various influences that led women to chose pastoral ministry she found that for 82 percent of the participants it was an 'inner call,'⁶⁹ She further found that because of their social conditioning, the women often did not really expect that they would be successful in their ministry. Sauder suggests that one factor that kept them 'bound' and prevents them from ministering boldly was their need to lead in such a way that relationships were not disturbed. Besides psychological factors she points in particular to the 'language of discipleship' as an underpinning factor for this phenomenon in Mennonite women. Mennonite women in particular felt obligated to 'fulfil others' demands' – and the demands of discipleship are many! They are expressed primarily in humility and in the selfless service of others – the original concept of discipleship as a commitment to the divine call of Christ has largely been forgotten. Based on Sauder's findings we may conclude that, only if women succeed in re-orientating themselves from the obligation of discipleship as a means to address the needs of

⁶⁴ *CIM/AIMM A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, pp. 685f

⁶⁵ BURKHOLDER Sarah, 'Support needs of Bicultural Single Anabaptist Women,' in *Mission Focus*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 1991, pp.7-10, p.8 (quoting Austin 1983:278-287)

⁶⁶ *CIM/AIMM A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, p. 686

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 685f

⁶⁸ Sauder Renee, 'Inner Call/Inner Ambivalence: Conflicting Messages in a Fragile Conversation.' In *Understanding Ministerial Leadership: Essays Contributing to a Developing Theology of Ministry*, John A Esau (ed.), pp. 47-56)

⁶⁹ *Ibi.*, p.47

others to the liberating call of Christ to serve him rather than people, can ministry, including missionary service, be done in its true sense.

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PART TWO: Case Study

Part Two is a Case Study of Mennonite women missionaries from North America who lived and worked as wives or single women in various Central African countries during the second half of the 20th century. These women, mostly belonged to the General Mennonite Conference based in Newton, Kansas. They all served under *Africa Inter Mennonite Mission (AIMM)*, formerly *Congo Inland Mission (CIM)* based in Elkhart, Indiana. Some also served with the *Mennonite Central Committee*, a largely relief organization established after the Second World War. Our case study, through the use of interviews and archival sources, explores the sense of call of these women, and its role as a potential support factor, both in the initial re-location experience from North America to Africa and back 'home,' and in their mission experience as a whole.

Purpose and Process

The purpose of Part Two is to test on a select group of women missionaries our theory that a sense of call acts as a potential support factor. This is done by using three related frameworks. Firstly, the theological-historical findings of Part One of the study, secondly, the women's early Socio-Theological Profile, and thirdly the women's personal accounts of their mission experience. The investigation of the second and third frameworks both form part of the case study.

The gathering of information for Part Two developed along the following lines: A preliminary feel for the issues was gained mainly through e-mail correspondence with a few selected past and present Mennonite missionaries. This background information combined with material gleaned from various literary sources on missionary life, missionary care, etc., formed the initial basis for the thrust of my investigation. The main gathering of information was conducted firstly in North Newton, Kansas, where the archives of the General Conference mission agency are located, and where there is a large community of retired General Conference missionaries. The initial approach to the Mennonite mission community in North Newton/Newton, Kansas, had been facilitated by my supervisor Professor John DeGruchy, who had previously spent a sabbatical there. The North Newton community then secondly referred me to the mission community in Elkhart/Goshen, Indiana, where the headquarters of the *AIMM* were located, and which also had a large population of mostly retired missionaries.

Sample and Scope

Overall I conducted 45 interviews with Mennonite missionaries who have served in Africa. Once I had narrowed down my scope to *CIM/AIMM* missionaries I used 23 of those interviews in my work. Three of these were repeat interviews, and two were interviews conducted with past and present male mission staff. The age of the interviewees ranged from early 30s to early 80s. The majority of interviews were retired missionaries, or younger missionaries who had served as short term missionaries. Two missionaries were still active missionaries and were spending their furlough in the US at the time. Of the interviewees included three were single. Of the archival material I studied I included 69 archival documents (AD) in the study. They mostly consist of Preliminary Information Blanks, Application Forms and correspondence between the missionaries and the mission board, and range in time from the early 1940s to the late 1970s.

Archives and Interviews

My host in North Newton, James Juhnke, who was then a professor at *Bethel College*, North Newton, gained access for me to the General Conference Mission archives in North Newton. There I was provided with the names of women who fell within the parameters of my case study and with boxes of mostly as yet un-sorted correspondence between missionaries and the General Conference mission board, which form the basis of my archival studies.

Meeting the Interviewees

In North Newton/Newton the response of past and present missionaries who had been contacted on my behalf by Tina Block Ediger, a retired *AIMM* office secretary of the GC mission agency, was surprisingly high, a first indicator that these women might be keen to tell their stories. This initial impression was borne out by the fact that eventually more women applied to be interviewed than it was possible to fit into my schedule. Prof James Juhnke remarked that never before had he seen such an enthusiastic response to a research project.¹

In Elkhart/Goshen where Leona Schrag, the senior office secretary at *AIMM* head quarters kindly arranged the bulk of the interviews before I arrived, the missionaries were very co-operative too, although, the response was less overwhelming. This was probably due to the fact that my interview request and my arrival in Elkhart/Goshen, occurred at very short notice, based on leads I received in Newton/North Newton, It had therefore not been planned and co-ordinated as well in advance.

The Interviewing Process

¹ Jim Juhnke, 14.06.02, at Bethel Library,

In Newton/North Newton, the interviews took place either in the homes of the interviewees, or at the home of the two different sets of hosts, and occasionally in public places such as coffee shops or in the open air. In Elkhart/Goshen, most interviews took place at the offices of the *A/IMM* head quarters, except for a few that were conducted in interviewees' homes or in restaurants.

The interviews usually lasted between an hour and ninety minutes and were recorded by means of a tape recorder. Certain interviewees, who proved to be particularly insightful and who made themselves available, were interviewed repeatedly. Occasionally other members of the women's families were present, adding their own perspectives. Although very little of their testimony is used directly in the study they made a valuable contribution to my understanding of some issues.

The interviews were conducted in the form of semi-structured life history interviews. The *life-history* approach was chosen in order to investigate the women's sense of call and its effect within the wider framework of their pre- and post- mission lives. This proved to be very valuable insofar as a better knowledge of the women's upbringing and their pre-mission adult life provided important additional insights into the phenomenology of their eventual sense of call. It enabled me as the interviewer in particular to probe issues such as the women's overall faith perspective and their faith and cultural heritage, which underpinned their sense of call. The semi-structured life history approach added insights into gender issues, and some accounts of their post-mission life encouraged me to extend my investigation into finding out what happens to the sense of call after the return from the mission field.

The *semi-structured* format further allowed me on the one hand to retain my overall focus, while at the same time providing the women with a degree of freedom to make contributions beyond the questions I had prepared. This deepened my insight into many aspects of the topic based on the interviewees' personal experience, and prevented me in some important instances from drawing premature conclusions, which were too narrowly based on literature study or on my own re-location experience.

Women's Response to the Project

As I have already mentioned, one of the remarkable features of the interviewing process was the eagerness of most women to tell their stories. This was due to various factors besides the fact that, as one woman put it, no doubt vicariously for many others, *I like to talk about myself*.²

² Missionary 18

For one, their mission experience represented for most an extensive, very important and greatly eventful segment of their overall life history and therefore remained close to their hearts.

In addition, many, particularly retired missionaries, after having on their return home been provided with an initial flurry of opportunities to speak about their experiences had found the interest in their mission stories waning. They themselves, though retained an often strong desire and need to talk about their experiences, partly as a cathartic exercise, but also in order to reintegrate themselves into their home communities from which they had become alienated.

Their sharing during the interviews therefore often had an unexpected therapeutic effect. It soon became clear that many of their memories remained very painful.³ This was *i.a.* illustrated by the fact that almost all the interviewees broke down at some point of the interview, and so I soon learnt to have a box of tissues available. Their emotional vulnerability put an additional onus on me not to simply view them as a source of information, but to respect their life journey and their calling.

The relative openness with which the missionaries shared their memories was aided among others by several factors: Firstly, as mentioned, I was recommended and introduced to them by people they knew and trusted. Secondly, I had two unique advantages. I was both an 'insider,' who could at least to some degree be trusted on account of my Mennonite background,⁴ and I was an 'outsider,' insofar as I did not belong to the local community, and therefore did not pose a major threat to their privacy. As a result 'keeping face' was less of an issue for the women. Thirdly, I usually introduced myself and my project by sharing some of my personal history and my own dislocation challenges. This created an instant commonality. Fourthly, I made it clear from the start that the women did not have to answer questions they were not comfortable answering, and that I was willing to switch off the tape recorder, should they request me to do so. This empowered them as interviewees. As it turned out occasionally somebody would decline to answer a particular question, ask me to switch off the microphone, or ask me at the end of the interview not to use certain parts of their stories in my published work. Fifthly, the interviews took place mainly on their territory, *i.e.*, either in the familiarity of their own homes or in other locations that they had chosen.

However, there were also some factors that hindered openness: Firstly, although I had the above-mentioned credentials, the women did not know me personally, and as a result they were likely to have wondered or even worried about how far they could trust me. Secondly, the fact that the interviews were recorded and that their answers might be quoted

³ This raises the question of the adequacy of their debriefing.

⁴ Jim Juhnke commented on the importance of this 'insider' phenomenon in the Mennonite community by saying something like, I hate to say this, but this is an important factor.

in my work made them reluctant in some cases, to truly speak their minds, e.g., when criticising other missionaries, speaking of mission-related 'scandals' etc. Thirdly, sometimes the women were hesitant to talk about particularly traumatic events in their lives, especially if they involved other people, such as their spouses or their children. Fourthly, occasionally interviews were conducted in a place with which the interviewee was not familiar.

It was my observation that overall – having grown up in an environment where truthfulness is a very highly valued virtue -- the women tried at all times to be 'honest' in the telling of their story, sometimes to their own detriment.

Representation of Evidence

My approach has been to allow the women to tell their stories in their own words through archival or oral *verbatim quotes*, which are interspersed with interpretative comments. It also largely refrains from questioning the genuineness of their statements.

The American spelling of the written quotes is adopted without further comment. In accordance with the practices of the time, what we would today refer to as 'person(s)' and 'humankind' are usually referred to as 'man' and 'mankind' by the women. This is relevant to our research insofar as it clearly shows this reflects the gender bias of the time. However, for the sake of readability this phenomenon will not be commented on every time it occurs. Where words or passages within quotes are omitted, this is marked by parenthesis, i.e., (...).

The *verbatim quotes* were pruned conservatively where necessary, mainly for the sake of clarity. The quotes are indented and written in italics. Where interviewees emphasised certain points by means of their gestures or tone of voice, the words are underlined. The dating method used by the writers of the archival material was retained.

CHAPTER FIVE

Responding to the Call to Discipleship

The following chapter investigates the women's early, *i.e.*, pre-adult view of God, their eventual divine caller and their view of what constitutes an appropriate believer's response to the divine call. In doing so we refer in particular to the distinctive Christ-centeredness of the Anabaptist/Mennonite call to discipleship, the impact of the fundamentalist-revivalist tradition and of individual personal factors, on the women's early understanding to the call to discipleship. The purpose of this investigation is to provide the foundation for a better understanding of the women's eventual sense of call to missions and its role as a support factor and/or as a burden. The inquiry relies primarily on the missionaries' oral evidence as described in the introductory chapter, with the occasional addition of excerpts from the written body of evidence, particularly from application forms.

The Divine Caller

God between the Anabaptist and Fundamentalist/Revivalist Traditions

The missionaries' memories of their early image of God reveal the amalgamation of traditional Mennonite faith and practice and strong fundamentalist/revivalist influences which had so concerned the proponents of a 'Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision.' Most of the missionaries were from an early age acutely aware of two differing theological emphases in their religious environment, and most of them felt that their families fell into either camp. In the case of Missionary 18 this theological division ran through her birth family. She remembered her grandparents and particularly her pastor grandfather on the one hand as having been *fundamentalist*, with a

... pretty prominent image of God as someone who punishes.

Her pastor father's⁵ preaching, on the other hand, was

... conservative in the sense Mennonite, but (...) not fundamentalist.

Instead he was *very, very, very strong on following the teachings of Jesus.*

Her father then also applied the typical Anabaptist Christo-centric hermeneutic to scripture. This, she remembered, caused alarm among the majority of her Mennonite community, who were influenced by the fundamentalist/revivalist theology:

⁵ When discussing their parent's religious convictions, the interviewees generally referred to their fathers' tenets rather than their mothers'.

In a time when most people in our Christian circles felt that the Bible was the written Word of God, directly from God, my father felt there was such a thing as progressive revelation, and that Jesus was the prior revelation of God. And a lot of people weren't very happy with that kind of a reading of the Bible. But that was the way he could reconcile the Old Testament with the teachings of Jesus.

Missionary 18 felt torn between these two theological views. Early on in her life, her father's theology caused her serious anxiety as she remembered

... there was a time when I was growing up that I thought my father was way too liberal, and I was sometimes afraid for his salvation.

However, in later adolescence she began to increasingly adopt her father's view of Christ's call. This decision left her with a latent concern that she herself might have gone *too far*.

Missionary 5⁶ had similar early memories of a divided theological environment. Her father strongly opposed the fundamentalist/revivalist influences, such as the revival-meetings, which were popular among part of her community, and where much of the preaching was on the reality of hell, divine punishment, Christ's return and the need for repentance and conversion. He rejected such preaching as a means through which one either *came to faith or grew in faith*. Instead, he focussed on Christ the servant as the role model for the discipleship-life, whom he tried to imitate in a mostly non-verbal way

... through the actions to the people (...) that needed help⁷

The girls usually adopted their parents', especially their fathers' theology.

The God Who is 'Not to be Trifled With'

For most women, whatever their tradition, God was to be taken seriously. Missionary 8 remembered:

He was a father, worthy of respect, of worship, of praise ...

⁶ 1st int

⁷ Ibid.

Missionary 17 similarly remembered the God of her childhood as having been very *holy*. For her this notion was epitomised by the traditional Anabaptist/Mennonite⁸ Spartan atmosphere of her church:

The Kleingemeinde,⁹ was very plain, a kind of greyish-blue colour - the floor and the benches, just ordinary windows, no decoration whatsoever in the church, no musical instrument whatsoever in the church.

Her sense of God's holiness was further reinforced by the fact that the church services were conducted in High German as opposed to the commonly spoken Low German or English:

... you addressed (God) in a special language.¹⁰

All this lead her to the conclusion that

God was austere, but very, very holy, he was not to be trifled with!

Although some other aspects of her perception of God changed with time, his holiness remained a permanent feature in her view of him:

I still believe he is very holy ...

Many interviewees remembered that mixed with their awe of God was a fear of God, which at times bordered on terror. This view was predominantly rooted in the fundamentalist/revivalist tradition, which strongly emphasised the realities of divine punishment, hell, etc. We will deal with this phenomenon next.

The Divine Taskmaster

Many interviewees had a dual image of God, derived primarily from fundamentalist/revivalist influences. It consisted of the God of love who simultaneously was the God of punishment.

Missionary 20 remembered:

⁸ From my experience currently there are various degrees of austerity to be found in present day Mennonite churches in the US.

⁹ German for 'Little Congregation'

¹⁰ Some interviewees grew up in a religious environment, which used High German exclusively as an ecclesiastic language.

I think I have always thought of God as a loving and caring personality, but I know that I also have always seen the judgmental aspect; that if you don't do what you are to do that there will be punishment.

For Missionary 16 the fear aspect was often the driving force behind her decision. Her conversion for example was motivated by,

... that kind of fear thing, to avoid the bad.¹¹

Missionary 13 had similarly fear-orientated early memories of God:

He was pretty terrifying. If you didn't behave, he was gonna get ya! And so yes, we had a real fear – a holy fear of God. That we had to behave and draw the line or he would punish us. (...) But this was as a young child, because we had a lot of warnings in the German language about how fierce, how strict he was. And of course they were a lot stricter in those days than they are now. I mean, you towed the line!

As her comments imply, most missionaries found relief in their later youth from the more extreme aspects of this early fear of God and especially from the fear of eternal punishment, mainly through their conversion experience. However, occasionally the terror of God and the fear of his punishment remained a permanent problematic feature of a woman's image of God. This was the case with Missionary 15:

I think (I had) too much of a legalistic image (of God), something that I have been trying to shake all my life, and I think it still comes out in different ways!

Although, both the intensity of her fear of God as well as its lasting effect were the exception among the interviewees many missionaries retained a life-long sense that God respectively *corrects* and *rewards* all their deeds and that he punishes their transgressions. Missionary 13 for example believed,

he has his ways of correcting us and then he rewards us.

Similarly Missionary 20 commented that

¹¹ 'The bad' meaning eternal punishment in hell.

if you don't do what you are to do, there will be punishment.

This image of God as a kind of divine taskmaster is likely to keep the missionaries in a permanent state of low key tension, causing them to be sub-consciously looking over their shoulders ensuring that God was not displeased with them. As such it might lead to a fear-driven as opposed to a love-driven ministry.

The following section shows that the women's early view of the divine caller was not shaped by theological concepts only.

Protective and Benevolent but Remote

Many missionaries' view of God was also reflective of their experience of their fathers. Many of these men were shaped by their Mennonite heritage, by their European backgrounds, and by the fact that they and their families often had had to survive great hardships on account of their faith convictions before they finally arrived in North America.

The missionaries usually spoke fondly of their fathers, yet there was also a certain painfulness attached to their memories. Many remembered them as comforting, strong protectors, but also as distant and silent enigmas. Missionary 17 recalled having had a strong feeling of security in her father's presence:

We thought of our parents as great protectors. Our father especially was. (...) He would sometimes be working late, and he would come home on a Friday night, and I would hear him coming in, and stamp the snow off his shoes on the rug, kind of sigh or make a sound – security, total security! Or when I would hear him bank the furnace for the night, total security! And then it would stay warm all night. And then in the morning I would hear him getting the fire going again to warm us all up. Yea, great, felt very protected, and very sheltered, very sheltered. Yeah, good feeling.

At the same time she remembered with pain that all her life her father had to a large degree remained a closed book to her:

I was all very sad when my father died, because I felt like I never knew him. My mother revealed herself to me, but my father did not.

She attributed his inability to communicate on an emotional level to the era in which he had grown up and to his European background:

In those days they couldn't. Those autocratic European fathers – they knew what their job was, and they did it well, but I don't think my – maybe my father said he loved me. I know my husband's father never did, never in his whole life! (...) Never once did his father say I love you. He was his youngest boy! It's hard, deep, deep it's missing!

In a similar vein Missionary 4 remembered prominently her father's inability to sympathise with what he perceived as 'weakness' in other people:

He was a survivor of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. He came (to Canada) as a two-year old. He only lived because 'MCC' sent relief food to that area. In fact he had health problems because of malnutrition. That kind of stayed with him for his life. (...) He was a survivor. He said, 'Everybody should be able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.' And we said, 'Some people can't do it, dad!' He said, 'Well I did, they should be able to!'

A number of interviewees made a direct link between their early image of God and the way they experienced their fathers or other important 'male figures' in their lives, emphasising in particular their kindness, and competence, yet also their 'vague,' 'distant' and/or 'non-communicative' nature. Missionary 5 and Missionary 1 connected their early image of a benevolent and protective yet remote God with their memories of important males in their early lives:

I would say it was a loving elderly male God. And most of the male figures in my life, were distant and sort of non-communicative with me. They were there to provide the boundaries, but like my grandfather (...) – he sat in the parlour and smiled. That was sort of my image of him, and I don't remember him doing much, but I'd say that was pretty close to what my image of God would be - those elderly males with beards who were in the community.

I think I probably thought of God as somebody distant, not really somebody that I could just feel a real closeness with. I'm not sure if that's tied in together with my relationship with my father, but my father was very much of an introvert. And he was not a talker, and he just was – his business mind, he was very wise, maybe that's kind of what my image of God was. It wasn't somebody that one could have a close relationship with in that you could talk

with him but he just knew the right thing to do. And so I think that maybe God was kind of that also. More of a distant person. But he could always hear what I would say or what my prayers were. It wasn't like he was so far a way that he never heard me he was always there.

Missionary 17 further echoed this observation, that her father-in-law's failure to express his love for her husband had left him with something 'deep missing.' Missionary 5 recounted how the emotional restraint practised in her family, and particularly by her father, similarly left her with a lifelong need to achieve perfection:

(In my family) you didn't express a lot of affection or affirmation. I have often said I never heard my father affirm me. Mainly what he said was, you could do better. So that left sort of a perfectionist kind of attitude to just – yea, you are always striving, you can always do a bit better.

It will later be demonstrated that if not resolved during the pre-mission period, such an emotionally distant image of the divine caller represented a potentially heavy burden. Although over time many had their early view of an emotionally distant God profoundly changed, this was usually a gradual and often painful process, sometimes brought on by the pressures of their missionary calling. Others, like Missionary 5 grappled all their lives with a father God, who they felt demanded nothing less than perfection.

We will now investigate what turned out to be the most individual aspect of the women's view of the divine caller, which is based on key personal experiences of God.

Experienced Personally

Some interviewees referred to personal, dynamic experiences that impacted strongly on their view of God. These cannot easily be assigned to Anabaptist/Mennonite or fundamentalist/revivalist or psychological formation categories. They tended to occur at times of personal crises, when God became very immediate and real to them. Missionary 17 remembered that such an experience left her in awe of God. There had been considerable tension in her home over her father's 'unholy' lifestyle, including his smoking habit. He finally spoke to a pastor. The results strongly impressed the young future missionary:

One Monday morning, very shortly after that, he was getting up, going to go to work at the potter. And he hadn't smoked when he first got up which was surprising. And he was gonna smoke at the bus stop where he was waiting for the bus to take him to work, and he threw the packet of cigarettes into the

snow, and that was it – it was gone! It was gone! Now that to a teenage girl is very impressive, if your father has smoked all your life, and all of a sudden the power of God just (click noise) – that's how it happened! And from then on there were devotions, and things were different.

When asked how she experienced that she responded: *I liked it! And I was very awed at the power of God – very awed!*

Missionary 9, a MK who had been brought up in an Indian boarding school, and was eventually sent to the US for her tertiary education, experienced the profound separation trauma that usually accompanies such a move. At the height of her crisis she had an experience with God which she later identified as a *changing point*, because she suddenly realised that God felt with her:

*Leaving home was like the end of the world coming to me. And when my father took me to Calcutta and put me on the ship, we were standing on the gang plank, just before the bell rang for all visitors to go off. He was talking to me and gave me a little New Testament in Hindi. (...) I still have that, I take it along to my talks sometimes. Then the bell rang, and he had to go off and I went up on deck as the tugs pulled us out on the Hugli (?) river. It was getting dark, and Calcutta was getting farther and farther away and I waved until I couldn't see him anymore. Then I went up to where my cabin was. I didn't want to go down to dinner. Everybody else was down at dinner. I went up on the deck, and it was night, just dark, and I was in the dark because I felt I was leaving my home and my family, and I was coming to this wild and woolly country of America. I was on the deck and it was just the stars shining down in the water and all I could see was one other steamer coming in. Those were the only lights I saw, except our own. So I said to God, God I said, I just can't do this anymore! I can't be going away from home. I said, since I'm seven years old every year I have had to say goodbye to my parents, and then hello when we get there for vacation for two, three months. (...) And so I said, I can't do that again. Well he says, you never need to say goodbye to me! That was a *changing point*, and I thought, God has his hand in how I'm feeling. Feeling has come into my whole experience. God is feeling with me. He knows how I feel. And he'll know that I'll understand it.*

Missionary 4 too recalled a profound personal experience with God at a time of crisis in her late teens. It was during her time of voluntary service, that she realised *that God transforms lives*:

My experience in voluntary service in North America taught me that God transforms lives. I had very rough teen years, and so that experience of living in a community of caring people - it brought a spiritual growth, and it reconnected me with God in a real way, where the Bible took on new meaning, prayer took on new meaning, ...

The following section investigates the women's early concept of what it means to follow the divine call.

The Believer's Response

Strong Community God-Consciousness

The missionaries grew up in an environment with a very strong God-consciousness. Most of them remembered that the church determined their culture. Missionary 21 is representative when she recalls that,

... being a part of a church community was important.

Missionary 18 remembered:

Our life was bound up with the church. That was the main thing in our lives -- God, the church.

This typical Anabaptist concept of the faith community, which combines the religious and the social spheres of life, created in its members an all-prevailing God-consciousness, which was *i.a.* expressed through frequent, regular public worship. Missionary 18 recounted:

We had church services on Wednesday nights, prayer meetings and of course church and Sunday school on Sundays. We had two services on Sunday that we always attended.

This public worship was usually complemented by family and personal devotions.

This is how Missionary 1 remembered family devotions around mealtimes:

We ate every single meal together as a family. And we had prayers before and after every meal, a prayer of thanksgiving after the meal, as well as a prayer beforehand. Often those were rote prayers, but not necessarily. But

then we also had devotions after every breakfast, and after every supper. And that would be out of a devotional book or magazine¹² or something.

Missionary 13's memory illustrates how seriously family worship was taken:

Every morning! Sometimes we had to get up for that, even though we had nothing planned for the day, we had to be up for breakfast, for the devotions. I remember in our early years we always also prayed in the evening, during reading or writing or whatever, then we'd kneel by our chairs.

Missionary 20 told how this early God-centred life style permanently shaped her devotional practices:

(The devotions) made a lot of impression on my mind.

And while she could not recall specific teachings, they left her with a lasting sense that:

¹² A formative contributory component of the missionaries' early concept of God was the classic Protestant children's literature. This included their children's Bible, children's songs and children's prayers, which were used as devotional aids during family or bed time devotions, and at Sunday school. Missionary 5 particularly remembered how pictures from the Children's Bible impacted visually on their early concept of God:

'The picture of Jesus holding a lamb, Jesus blessing the children, Jesus feeding the multitudes, Christmas, the open tomb. I think I don't think of those as Bible stories as much as the pictures. I can visualise the pictures that I remember.' (1)

Missionary 10 commented:

'I remember the first Bible I got and it was one of those traditional ones with a picture of a white Jesus on the front with the long brown hair, and the white children gathered around. So I'm quite sure that my first images of God were of a white male. (...) I think I would not have expanded my ideas of God much beyond that for a long time. It was never spoken – it was never said this is what God looks like. When children are presented with those pictures that's what they think. And then on the Sunday school material and whatever they were having pictures of Jesus, and we were talking about Jesus and God then that's what God looks like I think.'

The religious children's prayers and spiritual songs in use typically emphasised God's love and provision, and the need for leading a godly life. The classics among them were passed on from one generation to the next, contributing to a continuation of faith attitudes and theological concepts.

... there is always time for God in your day, and just the fact that (devotions) is an important part of family life.

This strong community God-centredness and the deeply entrenched communal and private worship practices formed habits for developing and strengthening their relationship with the divine caller, both on a personal and on a communal level.

In the context of an all-prevailing community orientated God-consciousness we will now investigate individual aspects of the believer's response to the divine call to faith, beginning with the role of repentance and conversion.

Repentance and Conversion

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a majority of missionaries grew up in communities affected by the fundamentalist/revivalist movement, where the divine judgement, the Second Coming of Christ, and the need for repentance and salvation from eternal condemnation were prominent sermon topics.

A childhood/adolescence crisis repentance and conversion experience was common among a significant majority of missionaries. The women remembered experiencing a sudden, strong sense of their sinfulness in the face of a holy divine judge. Their early repentance and conversion experience represented for most the moment when they received divine forgiveness and assurance of eternal salvation.

For some this assurance came about in stages as in the case of Missionary 6:

When I was about eight, my mother prayed with me one evening and I look back at the time when I accepted Christ in a personal way. However, until I was about age twelve, I often had a lot of insecurity. Now am I really saved? And sometimes there would be a lot of emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ or on hell, and I'd wonder (...) am I really saved? But when I was twelve I went to a church camp and made a commitment again of my life and from that point on I never had those doubts.

On the surface this view of salvation shifts the salvific act completely into the realm of divine grace, uncoupling it from the human response of the practical, committed discipleship life as a means of authenticating the experience as true repentance. However, we will discuss this issue further and in a more nuanced manner under the following section. For the time being it can be noted that for most their conversion experience amounted to more than simply escaping an eternity in hell, but represented serious, practical commitment to follow the

divine call. This was the case with Missionary 16, who was convinced that she would have chosen to *follow God* even if she had not been scared into it:

I think there was never a thought in my mind that that's not what I wanted to do with my life. It was the only option, really.

For most their conversion experience marked a clear beginning of a new and dynamic relationship with the divine caller. Among the descriptions used to describe the experience we find terms such as, 'to receive Christ as saviour,' 'to accept Christ in a personal way,' 'to have a relationship with God,' 'to give one's heart to the Lord,' etc. Missionary 7 remembered how her conversion experience at the age of twelve generated in her a *deep love for Christ*:

I realised what Christ had done for me, and that is all I need, and how that hope and assurance is in him, and not on our own good works, 'cause that might never be enough.

Most viewed their repentance and conversion experience as the foundation of their personal spiritual journey, and therefore as foundational to their eventual sense of call to foreign missions. This is *i.a.* illustrated by the fact that many interviewees made the point, usually without having been prompted, of referring to their conversion experience as part of their overall account of the development of their missionary call. The mission agencies' application forms took a similar approach by including questions regarding the applicants' conversion experience as a matter of course.

This early 're-definition' of their relationship with God, newly based mainly on human trust in divine forgiveness and love which was integral to their sense of call, would later strongly underpin their missionary experience as a support factor. As will also become evident, however, this initial experience had to expand with the reality of their missionary life for it to remain a support factor.

While the large majority of missionaries did have a repentance and conversion experience, which they retrospectively viewed positively, there were two sets of exceptions. The first were those who had a 'bad' conversion experience. Missionary 15, who was born into a strict Amish Mennonite church, was never able to overcome the deep lingering fear that for her formed part of conversion and divine judgement:¹³

I'm not sure what age I was, maybe thirteen. But I was very sensitive spiritually. And at whatever age I was, there were Brunk evangelistic tent

¹³ This would affect her faith life and her mental health to various degrees all her life, and significantly impacted on her missionary call and her field experience.

meetings going on in our area. And my dada was a great supporter of them, and so we went and attended. Then of course at the end there was an invitation given and I just felt that if I had done one wrong thing I couldn't raise my hand to say that I was saved or whatever the question was. During that time then I even wrote a letter to the Brunks, or the secretary I think got the letter, saying something about I had raised my hand when I shouldn't have. I mean even the guilt! And I mean that just does not give a good feeling about spirituality.

This incident would later have a profoundly negative affect on her sense of call and on her overall mission experience.

The second set of exceptions consists of those who explicitly or implicitly stated that they never did have a personal crisis conversion.¹⁴ Among them was Missionary 5, who remarked:

I don't remember a strong 'I was saved on this day or that day.'

Instead she remembered having had a *sense of growing into faith* by studying and absorbing biblical teaching as a *criteria (sic) for life*.

A sense of growing into faith was there. And we studied the Bible. And I think it's just biblical study, we just absorbed that and that was sort of the criteria for life. And yea we memorised, and we had theology, and all these things built on that.

In the following section we investigate their early understanding of discipleship as a human response to the divine call.

Discipleship: Its Prevalence and Practice

Were these Mennonite women familiar with the term and concept of discipleship during their youth? The range of answers was broad. Some did not remember the term being used at all, some encountered it occasionally while others recalled discipleship having been 'very strong.' Missionary 20 was adamant that the term discipleship did not feature in her youth. When asked whether discipleship or was emphasised in the circles where she grew up, she replied:

Well yea. (...) When I grew up it wasn't called discipleship

¹⁴ Some interviewees did not comment on the subject at all. Everybody however, was requested to recount their conversion stories on the application forms.

When asked about 'Nachfolge' she said:

I don't recognise that German word, no.

Missionary 19 similarly did not remember the term having been used in her youth:

I don't know that it was particularly used a lot.

But in Missionary 5's childhood discipleship played a pivotal role:

Yea, discipleship was a strong thing.

While clearly not everybody grew up being familiar with the term, all those who commented on the topic felt that they were taught a practised form. Missionary 20 and Missionary 19 commented:

What I think of as discipleship is living a Christian life day by day. That was always strongly emphasised in my family, in my home church. (...) The fact of living for Christ, and it's not just a matter of OK now I have my ticket to heaven, now I do whatever I want. But that we belong to Christ. That was just always a part of my teaching and my family and my church, in our Christian schools.

I think we were taught that as a disciple of Christ, as a child of Christ, we needed to follow and that means what discipleship is.

The interviewee, who had remembered discipleship as having been a strong thing, similarly defined it as an ongoing, practical commitment to follow Christ, which she defined in the typical Anabaptist Sermon on the Mount and Gospel tradition as

... following Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount, the Gospels, the specific teachings of the Gospels.

Common to the interviewees from both the more traditional and the 'revived' background was understanding that the Christian life was a serious, practical and ongoing commitment to follow Christ, and that there was no such thing as cheap grace. Where they differed, however was in their Christological emphasis. For many Christ was primarily the salvific Christ and secondarily

the role model of the Sermon on the Mount, while for others he was the primarily the role model of the Christian life.

One of the symbols of their commitment to follow Christ was their baptism. Missionary 2 remembered her baptism subsequent to her conversion as having been

...very important.

For her the meaning of her new life in Christ was encapsulated by the words of the hymn 'O Jesus I have Promised to Serve Thee to the End,' which was sung by her Sunday school teacher at her baptism. This song that remained with her as

... a meaningful memory of my baptism.

For Missionary 1 her baptism, at least in retrospect, represented a critical event in her spiritual development. It symbolised the public confirmation of her commitment to follow the call of Christ, which to her meant modelling her life on his. When asked whether her baptism meant anything to her spiritually she replied:

It did, very much so. I think probably more in retrospect than on that day specifically, but for me it was a time to actually acknowledge that decision that I had made, and that really was – not necessarily a turning point, but a pivotal point in my life. That it is a public confession - that is publicly I'm saying that I want to follow Christ, and I want to live a life that is as his example is to us. And so to me that was a very special time in hindsight. I'm not sure on that day specifically that much.

In the women's view of their baptism we again find their emphasis on human resolve and commitment to follow the call of Christ. From a pastoral perspective we need to re-emphasise the potential burden contained in this interpretation, based on the fact that it pins much of the success or failure of discipleship on human 'oughts,'/effort, or to use Lutheran terminology, on human works as opposed on divine grace.

Many missionaries were taught from early on to include the suffering for the sake of Christ into their understanding of discipleship. Missionary 16 remembered:

As a teenager in Brazil, our youth group had a big emphasis on being broken, and going through hardships, and how that's building character, and that was really ingrained in me.

Missionary 1 was taught a similar view on the ultimately sanctifying benefit of Christian suffering, or of *being crushed*:

I remember one communion service was just extremely meaningful, (...) because they brought the wheat and the grapes to it, and emphasised how these things have to be crushed before, the bread and the wine, and how we (thumps her hand with her fist) need to be crushed. Sometimes our wills need to be crushed (thump), and our thinking needs to be crushed (thump) to follow Christ's example.

This awareness of suffering as being integral to 'following Christ's call' was underpinned by the familiar family stories of intensive and extensive suffering for the sake of Christ's call. In these stories those who had undergone 'voluntary' persecution and suffering were seen as heroes, because in typical Anabaptist fashion they had followed the call of Christ not only in the private but also the social sphere. Missionary 5, who had been deeply moved by the tragic fate of some ancestors from Russia, who, indirectly, because of their pacifist stance, had lost sons found this still very much part of her Mennonite identity:

We had several great uncles, or would it be even a generation back, who came (to the US) because their young sons were going to be drafted. And when they came here, those sons within a year or two drowned in a river. And the tragedy of that – because the parents had sacrificed so much fleeing the draft!

The extent and importance of such oral and written family martyr traditions resulted in the fact that many women viewed practical suffering for the sake of the call of Christ as the norm rather than the exception. While these traditions constituted a potential support factor, insofar as they prepared them well for missionary hardships, the danger existed that they might prevent them from realistically judging the toll such suffering takes on the sufferer.

This tendency in the missionaries' heritage to disregard one's human limitations by setting oneself unrealistic goals is further exacerbated by the service ideal, contained in Anabaptist Christology and Christ's call to discipleship, featured prominently in the upbringing of many. An investigation into the missionaries' early understanding of this service concept shows that they, some more than others, remembered perceiving *serving*, *helping*, and *sharing*, particularly with the less fortunate, as a *general way of life*. Missionary 5 recalled of her family,

... there was concern for the marginal in the community and in the world.

Missionary 18's parents similarly emphasised spiritual and physical Christ-centred service above any financial considerations:

They believed in following Christ, and that was the way they read their Bible. That this is what we were to do, to bring people to Christ and to help them in whatever physical or spiritual way it was possible. The idea of making money was never in their mind – as long as they had enough to eat, that was all they cared about.

She recounted how such spiritual and practical concern for the less fortunate was expressed:

A lot of people would come to my parents for counselling. And after we kids were gone they even had a number of people, widow women who were ill and couldn't take care of themselves, come and stay with them over extended periods of time. Another thing that they did lot of – at the end of the war, my mother was involved very much in mending and sending relief clothes to Europe.¹⁵ The women in our church would get together and they would mend. We had a garage always full of clothes to be gotten ready and sent. Also - now this, the spiritual and the rest of our lives was always very much (interwoven) – we had a program in the summer for recreation for kids, and we used to have four weeks in the summer of vacation Bible school, in which we would teach not just the Bible, but also crafts. My father would teach woodworking and my grandmother and my mother and some other women would teach embroidery, and that kind of thing. My parents were very much involved with their children, as far as helping them and so on. It wasn't so much (religious) practices like rituals. It was more just the general way of life.

These acts of service, particularly if they were conducted towards people outside the Mennonite community, usually had the additional purpose of non-verbal witness to one's faith. For the father of one missionary Christian witness was

... more action than (...) vocal - than saying anything.

¹⁵ Probably through the MCC, which made helping in the spirit of Christ its motto

She remembered examples of such practical witness on her father's part:

We lived on the edge of the (Mennonite) community and my father was always fixing the neighbours' machines when he should be on the fields harvesting. And so they late at night would need repairs. So he would help them to get their machinery repaired so they could get up to their fields, rather than say 'you should have all winter been repairing your machines.' Or 'I'm not going to help because you were sitting around drinking or something when you should have been working.'¹⁶

This servant spirit of generosity was further expressed in the extensively practised hospitality in the childhood homes of the future missionaries. Missionary 18 recalled:

My parents were very hospitable. Their home was always open. (...) There were always new people coming to church, and a lot of people coming from out of town to school or something stayed, and there was always room at the table for another person. So we always had company on Sundays and sometimes during the week too.

The service principle was further evident in the 'alternative service' that the men in many missionaries' families chose instead of doing military duty. This is a clear example of discipleship transcending the private sphere, through practising the peace principle in civil society, and willingly accepting the consequences. Missionary 1 remembered, that 'doing service' formed part of her family tradition:

All of us, except my brother who is handicapped, have done service at some point, someplace in the world or for some period of time in their life, and that is just a given (...) And so that was kind of a family attitude. All of my siblings, I, all of my extended relatives, that's just who we were. We all did that.

Indications are that the distinctive Anabaptist/Mennonite service principle still formed part of the missionaries' early socio-religious profile, although not in every case to the same degree. It was particularly formative for those who grew up in a predominantly traditional

¹⁶ Missionary 5 further illustrated the strong service solidarity, which existed within the Mennonite community itself: 'My father helped a lot of struggling young couples. They would be hired men for us for a couple of years, and then he would help them get a farm or get established, this kind of thing. That way (he) financially helped them get on their feet in some way.'

Anabaptist/Mennonite environment. In typical Anabaptist tradition it orientated itself on the Christ of the Sermon on the Mount and on his call: 'follow me.'

Discipleship and Witness: A Contentious Issue

For the women one of the contentious issues concerning discipleship during their youth was the question whether, in what form, and to what degree open evangelism formed a part of Mennonite discipleship. The way this question was answered would in many instances have major consequences for their eventual understanding of their missionary calling.

Overall the women's early understanding of the role of open evangelism in discipleship was largely determined by the slant of their theological background. Missionary 5 observed:

All these evangelist Billy Graham kind of people that came, the mass decisions, big campaigns, and rallies, and tent meetings (...) was not part of my growing up. Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade, that kind of thing. Although, I think it caused a lot of divisions in our churches. It seemed like churches either went towards discipleship or evangelism, but had a harder time integrating the two.

In her case, evangelism did not feature prominently in the discipleship concept as she encountered it in her youth:

I think discipleship (...) probably had more of a connotation of your daily life. The evangelism aspect was not strong in discipleship I don't think. I think evangelism became more a (feature) of the evangelical movement here, and we as Mennonites shied away a lot from that. The Mennonites in the East did a better job of incorporating that without a lot of the fundamentalist aspects of that. But we here were much more influenced by the fundamentalist movement. And for my parents, they had nothing to do with that. That was just fake!

For Missionary 20, however, open evangelism was integral to discipleship:

And then (after becoming a disciple) it's a matter of making other disciples. Then we share our faith and then those people also need to be taught.

Clearly the women's early differing understanding of the role of open evangelism in discipleship would later affect their interpretation of their missionary call. Both views would

contain their respective potential to act as support factors and/or burdens as we will demonstrate at a later stage.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER SIX

The Call to Live as a Mennonite Should

This chapter investigates the women's early understanding of the Anabaptist/Mennonite concept of being in but not of the world. It demonstrates how in the environment in which they grew up the Anabaptist concept of the two worlds had largely come to describe the contrast between Mennonite and non-Mennonite society. To live as a Mennonite should had primarily come to mean adherence to certain cultural norms and practises which could be traced back to the near literal Anabaptist reading of the Sermon on the Mount. Based on this understanding of their Mennonite identity the women experienced their community as a community in exile.

The Two World Paradigm

In early Anabaptism the church, the community of saints, was central to the life of the believer. In the early experience of the missionaries the church still played a central role. This is illustrated Missionary 18's memory:

Our interests revolved around the church.

As a result the missionaries were strongly aware from an early age of there being two distinct worlds. Missionary 8, who grew up in a predominantly Mennonite community, remembered that for her as a child the Mennonite and the non-Mennonite worlds did not mix:

We did not do anything with all of those other people, they were not Mennonites!

Even missionaries who grew up in Mennonite communities as minorities clearly lived in a two-world paradigm. Missionary 4 remembered how her mother kept the demarcation lines between the two worlds intact by insisting on sending her children to Mennonite schools:

Everybody else went to the local school, but my mother said no, we were going to the Mennonite boarding school!

Clearly, for them the church-world paradigm, which in the 16th century was a purely ecclesiological concept, had taken on socio-religious meaning. What had remained was the

strong adherence to a dichotomous world view, and the related concept of being in the world but not of it was still familiar to many. When asked if she was taught the concept of being in the world but not of it Missionary 5 replied:

Yea it was central when I was growing up.

Although not everybody was familiar to the same degree with the concept as such, everybody was familiar with its practical outworking. This was because, as will be explored in the following section, its meaning too had shifted from the ecclesiological to the religious-cultural realm in the form of an amalgamation of religious, ethnic, and socio-economic values. As such it strongly shaped the women's identity, and indirectly strongly impacted on their implementation of their mission call.

Anabaptist Identity

Asked about the values with which they grew up, Missionary 17, Missionary 1 and Missionary 19 provided the following sample lists:

*Honesty, hard work, obedience, pulling your fair share of – whatever;
honesty and wholesomeness;
honest living, frugality, to work hard, and to do a variety of things in order to
enable the children, (both male and female) to make our own living eventually.*

These values echo the ascetic/perfectionist slant of the Anabaptist/Mennonite monastic roots and the movement's optimistic regenerative anthropology. In their youth the women were reminded in many ways that they had to live up to these ideals because they were Mennonites. This is illustrated among others by Missionary 17 who remembered her mother saying

... good little Mennonite girls don't dance.

On probing more deeply into the women's interpretation of being in the world but not of it, it became clear that one important meaning they attached to the concept was that of simplicity and frugality. Missionary 5 made a direct link between a non-materialistic lifestyle and the call to be in the world but not of it:

*(Being in the world but not of it) (...) meant that we would have less
clothes probably, that we had only enough to meet our need. You*

didn't need to follow the fashions. When you bought a pair of shoes you bought the clumpy solid kind that would last forever. (...). I would have liked for more pretty clothes, but the reason we didn't have pretty clothes is because they wouldn't last for four years, and it took more time - they were very practical reasons.

Missionary 8,¹ although seemingly not very familiar with the exact term 'in the world but not of the world,' attributed to it a similar meaning:

I think we do have some families who I would consider being in the world but not of the world – is that the way it is? Who are living a very simple life style, who shop at the 'Et Cetera Shop,'² and are happy with what they find there rather than going buying new clothes at a retail shop, who are satisfied with doing fun things in a simple manner.

This emphasis on simplicity and frugality was also evident in the food with which the women grew up. Although many stressed having eaten well, their food was basic rather than fancy, also reflecting their mostly rural back ground. Missionary 20 recalled:

(We ate) meat and potatoes, and bread. We always ate well. Mother enjoyed cooking I think and she just did a lot of it. Did a lot of home canning, later then freezing, but we didn't have a freezer when I was growing up. In fact I can remember when we didn't have electricity, I remember when we got electricity in our home. So she did a lot of canning but we ate well, yet they didn't have a lot of money. So we didn't have extravagant things.

Missionary 6's memories illustrate that at times a simple and frugal life style, was as much the result of economic circumstances as it was a reflection of traditional Anabaptist virtues. This especially as many women grew up during the Great Depression:

As I look back on it now, we and the people that were around us were basically fairly poor. My father's salary was very minimal from the church,³

¹ As an exception, to further illustrate the point, this quote of an interviewee's adult experience is inserted.

² A Thrift Shop in Newton, KA

³ He was a part time minister of a church as were many other fathers.

and he had to supplement that with raising a cow and chickens and he did some carpentry work. And I remember the feed for the cattle would come in these bags that had nice designs on it. So my mother would maybe make me a dress out of one, and I'd see another friend, 'Oh,' she said, 'my mum made curtains out of that sack!' Our mothers all made our clothes.

Growing up with the values of simplicity and frugality had long-term consequences for many, although they were experienced differently by various individuals. This is illustrated by the following three women. Missionary 5 observed that for her these 'ascetic' values became at least partly a burden in later life in the sense that she felt unable to escape them even if she had wanted to:

Once I was on my own I could buy whatever I wanted to. But, boy, the values had already been instilled strongly!

Missionary 6, however, stressed the enriching aspect of growing up with these ideals, because they taught her to live simply without feeling deprived:

Being frugal was a way of life for everybody, and I never felt poor. And I really credit my parents for that, because they lived very simply and frugally, but we never felt poor. They never gave us that impression. And that to me is being rich!

Missionary 11, who grew up as a Methodist,⁴ but had been exposed to a very basic early life style in a rural area during the Great Depression, explicitly viewed her frugal childhood as a crucial support factor in her later mission experience:

I had worked very hard on the farm. I know how to do without things. I wasn't perfect but I had a lot of early life I feel that helped me very, very much on the mission field!

From these comments we gather that clearly the simplicity and frugality of their early years had the potential to act as either support or a burden in the missionaries' eventual interpretation of their sense of call.

⁴ Her example shows that not only Mennonites grew up with frugality and simplicity. It represented also the life style of rural people. But for the Mennonites those values were in addition socio-religious virtues.

We will find that the same was the case with such Mennonite virtues as a high work ethic, responsibility, and self-sufficiency. The women grew up knowing that the quality of the women's work was expected to be of a high standard. Missionary 5 directly linked this to the concept of 'being in the world but not of the world:'

Being in the world but not of the world meant (...) you didn't do things slipshod, you did them well. Whether it was your school paper or your work in a committee in church, (...) or you were on a voluntary service assignment, teaching Bible school.

In addition they were taught from an early age to cope with big work loads, many of them physically demanding. The family chores were generally divided along gender lines with women being responsible for the domestic domain, including the often substantial gardens, and the males being responsible mainly for the typical outside work, with women helping out on the fields. The girls often worked *very hard* alongside their equally hardworking and competent mothers. This was the case for Missionary 1 and Missionary 5:

My mother grew up during the depression, and she made us work very hard too. With the garden and then with the chores, and we had chickens and cows and all things that are on a farm that we worked hard at doing also.

I basically worked alongside my mother. In summer we would have been outside in the garden at dawn till breakfast, and then canning, putting up food. This thing, on Monday you do laundry, on Tuesday you iron, and Wednesday and Thursday, something for everyday. During school days I think I was always responsible for making the lunches, because we took our lunch to school, washing dishes, washing the cream separator – I hated it! Because in summer it smelled like sour milk, and in winter, the back porch was so cold.

Missionary 14's story illustrates the heavy physical aspect of their work:

I (...) remember that we had chores to do. One of my jobs was to bring in coal. In North Dakota we used coal for heat instead of wood. And we did not have electricity at that time. And so we had to carry our water. And we had a little red wagon. I think it was an

eight-gallon, maybe just a five-gallon cream can to transport this water, and my twin brother and I were the ones that did that.

Many of the girls were all-rounders, who were competent not only at traditional women's work but also at male tasks such as handling heavy farming equipment. Missionary 20 recalled:

... even girls were out in the field, driving a tractor and stuff.

In this environment the missionaries learnt from early on to carry responsibility. Missionary 1 remembered developing the children's sense of responsibility as one of the explicit reasons why her parents assigned duties to them:

My parents never really gave us money to be stewards of, but chores (were used to teach)responsibility.

These chores developed their reliability, perseverance, resourcefulness, and self-sufficiency:

(The tasks were) some of the common ones like, set the table, and wash the dishes. And then the way our parents divided up the chores was that every other one was to milk the cows and feed the chickens, milk the cows and feed the chickens. And so I fed the chickens, for years, and years, and years. And even into high school, when I had basketball practices and all these school activities, I had to come home and the chickens were still my responsibility. (...) That was just my job, and I had to do it. I had to figure out what time worked best for me to do it. Or if I wasn't going to be there just to make sure to give them extra feed or to make sure that somebody else could give them water if I couldn't be home that evening. So that was responsibility.

They were brought up to develop a high degree of resourcefulness and independence. The children learnt from early on that although it was considered a virtue to help the less fortunate, even if they were non-Mennonites, good Mennonites did not to accept 'outside' assistance such as government support, for example. Missionary 18 stated categorically:

During the depression a great many people were on relief. My father, he was a Mennonite and he would never consider going on relief!

Missionary 17 recalled her outrage as a child at learning this lesson:

During the depression (...) the bread wagon and the milk wagon stopped at the council houses. And at our house my mother baked all our bread, and she bought the milk from a man that came down the back alley. (...) She'd come back, and then I wondered, why can't we be on relief? My father told me that Mennonites don't go on relief. (...) Yeah, and then I thought 'That's not fair!'

This spirit of independence and self-sufficiency tended to go hand in hand with a certain attitude of pride. Missionary 5 alluded to this phenomenon with the following observation:

Many students and especially the boys were trained to be quite self-confident and arrogant, and so there was - how would you say that - I think we were strong personalities, because in the rural areas you weren't babied. You weren't given a ride, you walked! And you could complain if you wanted to but it didn't do any good. Nobody would listen, so you just did it!

Missionary 1 noted that this attitude became asset for those who joined short-term voluntary service programs:

Our young men were always very popular because of their 'can do' attitude.

The effect this attitude had on the long term missionaries will be discussed at a later stage.

Life in Exile

As was to be expected, especially those who grew up in Mennonite communities often had a strong sense of 'them' and 'us.' Missionary 8 recounted:

That's where all my associations were until I went to high school. Really I did not have any friends outside of the Mennonite community until I went to high school.

The majority of missionaries, particularly in their younger years, attended public schools in predominantly Mennonite areas, which were almost exclusively attended by Mennonite children. In response to questions of how they fitted into the wider society, and whether they had any non-Mennonites contacts, or were discouraged from that Missionary 1 responded:

I don't think I even really had the opportunity to, because I went to a public school, but almost all of our classmates were Mennonites. They didn't all go to our church, but they went to other Mennonite churches. (...) In high school there were non-Mennonites, (...) but I think that probably even there I tended to veer towards the Mennonites or the people that had similar beliefs. And so I don't think I was discouraged or held back, that was just the kind of a world that I was in.

A minority of interviewees, who grew up in non-Mennonite communities, mixed more easily with outsiders. Missionary 17 recalled having very good friends in school who were not Mennonites. However, when it came to the crucial stage of choosing her marriage partner the woman's parents made sure that she would marry a husband from the Mennonite community:

By the time I was in high school, I was back in (Mennonite) Steinbach. And as my sisters reached high school age, they went to Steinbach to stay at my grand parents', or at my aunts', because my mother didn't want us to marry the (non-Mennonite) Sperling boys. She wanted us to marry Mennonites, and we did!

The separation between the two worlds revolved around certain recurring issues. For many the Mennonite peace stance was one of them. It was particularly topical during World War I and II. Missionary 12 remembered,

When World War II started, in our church there were several men who were of the drafting age. And one family had four sons and three daughters, and the oldest three sons all were in the army. And my dad asked them to come to our home. And he talked to them for

a long time. And they still all went. And then dad explained to us children what difference we could make in the school: 'If you hear an argument do you enter in and fight against the person?' I guess as little kids at that time we couldn't imagine very much how we were different, but we were! And I think most of the teachers knew that the Mennonite children were maybe a little bit different.

Often it was also the moral/ethical values of their community that prevented the children from getting 'entangled' in the world and its practices such as dancing, going to movies, or drinking alcohol. Missionary 17 remembered her mother's strong objection to her participation in a school dance that had been organised for the visiting British king and queen, because *good little Mennonite girls don't dance*:

Well, the king and queen, George the Sixth, and Queen Elizabeth were going to come to Winnipeg. And I came home from school. I was so terribly excited! I remember running down the back alley, so I'd get home first to tell mother. And I told her that we were all going to practice to dance for the king and queen. And my mother got this certain look on her face. And I knew something was wrong. And she said, 'Don't you know that good little Mennonite girls don't dance?' 'But for the king and queen, mother!' She let us. We wore her down! We did, we danced for the king and queen!

In addition to their peace stance and ethical/moral distinctives many interviewees also experienced 'being different' based on their ethnicity. Once their ancestors had settled in the United States, their acculturation commonly progressed cautiously and to a very limited degree.

Many families retained German as their home language. Some missionaries grew up with Low German as their mother tongue, High German as ecclesiastical language, and English as basically a foreign language, which they were obliged to acquire at school. Based on her isolated upbringing Missionary 7 actually believed that *everybody did that*. Another woman, however, recalled that

in our home, no we didn't speak any German.

Overall, living an insular exile existence was the only way of life most of the missionaries knew. Yet, paradoxically, their multi-lingualism and other non-American ethnic practices

reflect some of the cosmopolitan quality that, as we discussed in Chapter Three, is often representative of para-national and para-geographical communities that are poorly integrated into society as a whole. This international note that formed part of the women's early environment had come about through the faith-related migratory life that characterises Anabaptist/Mennonite history.

Potentially it also provided the missionaries with Mennonite specific coping skills for their journey to and from the mission field, especially as the call to 'leave' forms an integral part of the call to be in the world but not of it.

Many missionaries were still acutely aware as children that migration was integral to their community's interpretation of the call of Christ, and therefore formed part of their identity. In many families story-telling was used as one of the means to keep such memories alive. Missionary 5 observed,

I think we had a strong sense of our movement as a people, because of the persecution. From Holland to Germany to Prussia, and then why they came here, because of the draft. (...) So I think that gave us a strong sense of – we are different.

Missionary 1 understood the migration of her ancestors in the traditional Anabaptist/Mennonite faith context of the Abrahamic call, which orientates itself on the caller rather than on geographical or societal boundaries:

Maybe like Hebrews says, Abraham didn't have a land that was his own; he was a wanderer, and he went where God told him to go and I think that our whole background, our ancestors (...) they were wanderers too. There is no land that is their own - you go where God leads you.⁵

⁵ The oral traditions were often supported by a plethora of mementos, *inter alia* in the form of photos of which this missionary's parents possessed 'drawers full of their generation, and the previous generation, and other generations that they couldn't even identify anymore. In addition, records of family history were often meticulously preserved and researched: All four sides of my family tree had their own family book - has the genealogy book where it has been researched back and back, and back, what all their names were, and who they all were. And then stories about them, and journals or diaries that they wrote as they came over as they homesteaded in Kansas, those would be printed up. And so there is lots of very interesting stories that we know a lot about.'

This call to leave often brings with it a sense of alienation and the emotional pain that is attached to it. This was also the case for some of the women, particularly those who grew up in minority Mennonite communities, and who were often painfully aware of their outsider status. It seemed to be less of an issue for those who were safely embedded in majority Mennonite communities. Missionary 18 for example who grew up in a predominantly non-Mennonite community spoke of herself and her family as outsiders:

Missionary 18: We never felt a part of the community, because most of the people in our community were Catholic.

In spite of her family's limited integration attempts, she retained a dominant sense of social alienation in relation to her non-Mennonite environment. Somewhere else she sums up the list of things that made her different, as *just a different way of looking at life*. This is how she describes the emotional toll caused by her sense of alienation:

I was kind of lonely at school. Because I didn't do sports. I was not at all athletically inclined, and of course I didn't do a lot of what the girls did. I couldn't talk about movies, didn't go to dances, and although I always had friends, but I still felt kind of alienated.

However, she lost this sense of alienation once she started going to a Christian college, where for the first time in her school career she happily found herself among like minded people:

When I went to a Christian college, to me it was such a wonderful, amazing thing, to be able to fit in with people that had similar ideas and I could take part in the social events and so on.

Missionary 4 experienced how this sense of alienation is exacerbated if 'being different' is externally imposed, as tends to be the case for the children of those who follow the call. She grew up in a minority Mennonite community and experienced parts of her early imposed social isolation from her non-Mennonite environment as very painful. Motivated by a strong desire *to be like everybody else* she rebelled against the restrictions imposed on her by her family, trying *to find (her) own way* somewhere between the norms of her Mennonite environment and those of the non-Mennonite community. These early existential struggles fostered in her on the one hand an independent inner strength, but on the other hand it also left her with a lifelong lingering sense of social dis-connectedness and emotional loneliness:

I grew up in a (minority Mennonite) community. It was a very small Mennonite church and I was the only one in my age group. And so right from the start I was always upset with my mother! And I would say, 'Well, everybody else is doing it!' And I was very social and extrovert. I wanted to be like everybody else, and she wouldn't let me. She wouldn't let me do things that other people did, and I was just forced to be a strong individual. In my family I had a sister five years older, and a brother five years younger and then others older and younger than that, but I was very much alone also in the family. I had to find my own way all the time. (...) Everybody else went to the local school, but my mother said we were going to the Mennonite boarding school. And so our family was very different than the other families in the community there.

Learning to cope with this sense of alienation had two mission-related consequences for many women. On the one hand it fostered in them from early on a certain strength.

Missionary 4 observed:

I was just forced to be a strong individual.

On the one hand Missionary 18 directly identified her ability to cope with a sense of alienation as an important mission-related benefit because it prepared her for a similar outsider status on the mission field:

I think it was probably helpful in the mission work because I had been used to being different, and so it was not such a terribly big change.

As we will discover in later chapters, this sense of alienation or social dis-connectedness could also become a very real burden for missionaries who did for one reason or other not succeed in integrating with the African community, who could have been their the support.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Call as Support Factor?

The first part of this chapter investigates if and to what degree the Mennonite women on whom the study is based had a personal sense of call, the way they described it, its development and its discernment. The second part investigates how their sense of call or the lack thereof impacted on the women's short-term and long-term cultural re-location experience. These questions are investigated with reference to the mission agency's policy regarding the call. In addition, variables such as the source material, the era during which the missionaries served, the perspective from which a statement is made, *i.e.* in anticipation or retrospectively, the women's theological persuasions, as well as their marital status are taken into consideration. Where discrepancies between the written and the oral evidence occur, possible explanations are discussed.

A Sense of Call – Yes or No?

In considering the question whether the women had a sense of call or not we need to be aware that it was *CIM/AIMM* and GC policy to only accept applicants, who witnessed to having a personal sense of call. This is, directly and indirectly, evident from questions which, with minor variations, appear on successive versions of application forms throughout the decades. These include: *State briefly your motive and purpose in the missionary call*¹ or: *Do you expect to make missionary work your life vocation?*²

The application forms did not differentiate between gender or marital status. Identical questions had to be answered by male and female applicants and by husbands and wives. The *AIMM* secretary at the time the interviews were conducted, elaborated on this practice of insisting on an individual sense of call:

We feel that we will not send out a couple, unless they are together on their call. If one feels called, and the other one feels less of a call, or they're just going along because their husband has the call to ministry overseas, then we probably will not send them, because they need to be together.

¹ Cf. for example AD 7

² Cf. for example AD 57

He justified this policy *i.a.* with the increased stress marriages undergo in a foreign culture. This pressure he felt could only be successfully negotiated on the basis of a couple's common sense of call:

Because when they get out there - all the situations in Africa become more intense. Living becomes more intense, their friends aren't there, their families aren't there, the communication with the Africans is difficult, and so they have to learn a new language, cultural differences, everything. It can become more intense in their relationship with one another too. And so you have to make sure that they have a good, loving relationship, and also that they love the Lord, and that they have a similar call toward ministry.

Considering this mission policy, it is not surprising that on the application forms the vast majority of women witnessed to having a personal sense of calling. However, this initial impression takes on a greater complexity when it is combined with some of the retrospective oral evidence.³ From these interviews it becomes apparent that in some cases the women's sense of call at the time of their application was not as clear as might have been inferred from the forms. Missionary 8 for example stated on her application form that she had a personal sense of call.⁴ During the interview she relativised her original statement by explaining:

I don't know that I really can say that I had a call on my own, other that I thought that I could be a support for him in this work. It was exciting.

How do we explain such discrepancies between this written and oral evidence? There are several likely reasons. Firstly, some women might have witnessed to a clear sense of call in order to conform to the mission agency's expectations. This would have been a particular temptation for wives, who for whatever reasons wanted to follow their husbands into foreign missionary service. Secondly, not everyone who claimed to have had a sense of call might have been quite as sure about it as they stated on the official forms. During the informal interviews, conducted at a more mature stage of their lives, the missionaries were freer to express themselves in a more nuanced way. Thirdly, the archival material marked the outset of their missionary lives, while the interviews were conducted after

³ Some missionaries whose application forms were investigated, also granted interviews, usually decades after having filled in those forms.

⁴ AD 55

years of active foreign mission experience. In the interim their perception of the divine call itself had often undergone significant changes, the nature of which will be discussed more fully below. Fourthly, on a mission historical level some discrepancies between the older, written, and the more recent oral material are likely to be influenced by the fact that the two sources originate from different eras in the missionary movement. The application forms were mostly filled in at a time when the missionary movement in the western hemisphere was at its prime and strongly optimistic in nature with the clear-cut purpose of bringing the good news of salvation to those 'who had never heard.' In the words of Missionary 6,

... there was just a very positive image of mission work at that time.

The interviews, on the other hand, were granted in the post-colonial era, and at a time of increasing religious pluralism. By this time the traditional concept of Christian foreign missions had been extensively critiqued both regarding its purpose and its methods, by socio-political and religious movements. This critique had also affected many of the missionaries' home churches. As a result the traditional missionary movement had gone into a far more defensive mode, and speaking of a sense of divine call to missions had in the eyes of many become synonymous with arrogance and presumptuousness.

The combined written and oral evidence indicates that as far as the degree of their personal sense of call the women fall into three broad categories. Firstly, a majority had a definite personal sense of calling. This included all the single women. In the case of married women it either developed independently from, and/or in conjunction with that of their spouses.⁵ Secondly, some married women did not witness to a strong personal sense of call, but rather had what might be described as a passive sense of call, *i.e.*, they were willing to go along with their husbands' sense of call and adapted to the new situation over time.⁶ This attitude is illustrated by Missionary 22 for example:

*I would go, 'Where thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge,'
that sort of thing. And the thing that's always been, we have always*

⁵ These findings loosely fit into Dana Robert's observation based on biographies of 19th century female missionaries, that 'most of the time, the commitment to mission preceded commitment to the husband.' (Dana L. Robert, 'American Women in Mission, A Social History of their Thought and Practice,' Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1997, p.21)

⁶ Cf. Dana Robert's discussion of the substitution of their own call by 19th century (evangelical) missionary wives through that of their husbands, a practice she ascribes to a minority of women, *ibid.*, pp. 21f)

had really good experiences. So where ever God has led my husband, my experience is good too.

Similar remarks were occasionally found on application forms

Q: How did you come to entertain the desire to go into Foreign Mission work?

A: I had a deep desire to serve my Master in whatever work I would be placed. My husband felt the call to missionary service before we were married, I prayerfully sought God's will for my life and received the assurance that this was His will for me too.⁷

Thirdly, a few married women without a personal sense of call subjected themselves to their husband's sense of call against strong personal internal resistance, which they often retained throughout their mission experience. Missionary 14 is one woman in question:

It was my husband's idea that we go I drug my feet for a while, and finally I said, 'Well if that's where he wants to go that's where I will go too.'

The majority of women who went against their will were women in their late thirties, early forties, who had been married for a number of years before the couple started considering missionary service.

Development and Discernment of the Sense of Call

Early Stirrings

For most women the sense of call did not come as a thunderbolt from heaven; rather it developed over time. This is evident from the application forms.

Q. What influences have been most influential in leading you to consider this form of service?⁸

Q. How did you come to entertain the desire to go into foreign mission work?⁹

⁷ Missionary 28, AD 12

⁸ Cf. AD 45

⁹ Cf. AD 7

While the applicants' answers to these and similar questions varied in detail, some basic commonalities can quickly be identified. The fundamentalist-revivalist religious environment with its pronounced missionary vision, in which a majority had grown up, clearly played an important role in the development of their sense of call. It awakened in them from early on a keen awareness of the missionary dimension of the Christian faith. The key institutions of family, church, and school/college usually acted as important agents of transmission of this missionary vision during the women's formative years.¹⁰ This is illustrated by the following statement on an application form:

Q: What influences have been most influential in leading you to consider missionary service?

A: *I have had good Christian training in my home. My Church training has also had influence on my life. I also had the privilege of attending a Christian High School and attending Grace Bible Institute.*¹¹

This written evidence of an all-prevailing missionary vision is supported by the oral witness. Missionary 20 remembered that in her early experience it was assumed that

... all Christians are to share the message of life with others.

However, this was not the experience of everybody. Missionary 5 recounted that her family viewed overt evangelism as profoundly un-Mennonite:

All these evangelist Billy Graham kind of people that came, the mass decisions, big campaigns and rallies and tent meetings that was not part of my growing up; Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade, that kind of thing.

Others too were raised in families with similarly sceptical views of the traditional missionary vision. Missionary 1 recalled:

My father was not so committed to actual mission work, but he wanted us all to be involved somehow in the work of God's kingdom.

¹⁰ Some churches organised special Mission Festivals, which were seen as 'a real encouragement to the missionary as well as to the home people' (Missionary 41, AD 63)

¹¹ Missionary 20, AD 45

In her family 'work of God's kingdom' focussed on practical deeds of service rather than on open evangelism. The two missionaries quoted last came from different generations. The first one was in her late sixties when she was interviewed, the second one in her early forties. This seems to indicate that at least in their case it was not so much the era in which they grew up which influenced their thinking on evangelism, but rather their early theological environment. Indications are that the missionaries usually, at least initially, adopted the respective theological positions of their immediate environment. This manifested itself later in the women's divergent interpretation of their missionary mandate.

God used various other means to 'speak' to the future missionaries.¹² Important personal dynamics often also played a significant role in the process. One of them was the influence of their parents. During a time when the missionary call was held in very high esteem by many it was the pride and joy of many parents to witness one or more of their children joining foreign missions. Many women were from an early age aware of this desire of their parents for them to 'serve God' one day. Missionary 20 knew that she had been dedicated by her parents to God's service as an infant:

When I was a baby they had given me to the Lord to use in whatever way God wants to use my life.

Missionary 18 remembered being strongly conscious of her mother's desire for her and her siblings to become missionaries, an unfulfilled dream that the mother had originally had for herself:

My mother had sisters in China and in the Congo and in India as missionaries. And she had always wanted to be a missionary, but she felt that God called her to marry my father. That was before he was a minister, but she was very anxious to have her children be missionaries.

Retrospectively she observed how her parents' desire for her and her siblings seemed to have influenced their career choices:

(The parents) were very supportive of whatever we wanted to do. But one thing that we were sort of guided or directed to. I was a doctor, and I married a minister, three of my sisters married ministers, and the last one

¹² To determine if and to what degree it was God speaking through these experiences is beyond the scope of this thesis. This question will, however, at least to some degree, be dealt with again later on in the thesis.

was a nurse and married a nurse. So we were kind of directed to the ministry, some kind of Christian ministry. And also some kind of helping profession.

Missionary 24's archival statement on early influences on her missionary call echoes the importance of the parental role:

My parents are sincere christians (sic) and they were anxious for us to be of service to the Lord.

The extraordinary strength of the parental desire for one or more of their children to become foreign missionaries often overrode their need to have their adult children live in close proximity, and in the safety of their home country. This is illustrated in the interview with Missionary 19 for example:

M.S.: How did your family feel when you told them that you were going to go to Africa?

Missionary 19: My mother died while I was still in high school, a teenager, but my father was very delighted, as were my brothers. Four of my brothers had already gone to the mission field, two to Africa, two to India, one to China. And so this wasn't a shock to them at all.

M.S.: Usually when parents hear that their children are going far away, they say 'I wish she remained close by!' Why do you think your parents were so supportive of your decision?

Missionary 19: (...) Well they just committed us to the Lord and said follow what he wants you to do!

Against this background missionary 18 pondered retrospectively:

I'm never really sure if I actually had a call from God or if it was just my conditioning and my upbringing.

As mentioned before, it was not only their families that encouraged the children to join foreign missions. They received similar messages from their churches. This is illustrated in the interview with Missionary 6:

M.S.: What attracted you to the thought of becoming a missionary at that time?

Missionary 6: Missionaries were very much admired in my home; there was a real respect for missionaries.

M.S.: Why were missionaries held in such high esteem?

Missionary 6: I think that was part of the era in churches, and I suppose there was a certain sense in which they would rank Christian vocations, and missionaries were probably put on a pedestal, not that it was right.

Of those missionaries that visited her home she said,

I think that was a very important factor in my formation and my interest in missions.

It was common that the mission stories and missionary challenges the girls were confronted with left a deep impression on many of them,¹³ to the degree that some retrospectively saw such events as the initial trigger for their eventual sense of call. This is borne out by an account on an application form:

One Sunday morning some of our missionaries came to the church to give a program. After the service we went to the front to look at the things which they had brought with them. Two of us girls were standing there and one of the ladies said 'Here are two girls whom we hope to see in Africa some day.' That incident made an impression on me that stayed with me.¹⁴

Missionary 6 had a similar memory of a visiting missionary as a young Sunday school child:¹⁵

¹³ There was a strong indication in the written evidence that many considered missions from their childhood. Missionary 35 stated on her preliminary information blank that she had considered mission work 'Ever since I was a child.' (AD 31). This fact was so important that much later in her life it was also mentioned in biography memo about her. (AD 33)

¹⁴ Missionary 29, AD 14

¹⁵ Missionary 34 was one of those missionaries who presented the missionary cause to children during her furlough. In a letter she shared her joy of presenting 'a list of small articles such as I might need to take back with me when returning to the field,' to a group of 'smaller children' at a children's birthday party. (AD 30)

M.S.: Do you remember anything that those missionaries might have said or done that impressed you at that time?

Missionary 6: One incident comes to mind. One of the women doctors from India, I remember she was talking at Sunday school about India. But what I remember is that she said, 'Maybe God will call one of you children here to be a missionary.' And at that moment I thought, maybe it's me!

M.S. And did you keep that in mind?

Missionary 6: Yes, I think all the time. I'm not sure how old I was at the time, eight to ten years maybe. But even in high school when I would take classes I would think, 'Well, maybe typing or secretarial, maybe I can do that overseas, or if I were to do this,' and it was always in the thought of being a missionary with whatever skill I was doing.

M.S.: What did you imagine a missionary to be at that time?

(Missionary ...): That's been a long time. I don't remember particularly. I'm sure I thought of the preaching and teaching (...) But also just the exposure. I remember one time it was also a missionary from India that dressed me in one of those Indian saris. I was a teenager at that point.

Missionary 1 remembered that not only missionaries who returned from the field with mission stories, but also missionaries that were sent out left a significant impression:¹⁶

Our church was very mission minded. And we had members from our church who were sent out, with our church's blessing and support and all that.

The romantic component in the early stirrings of a sense of call was occasionally linked to persons such as a much admired Sunday school teacher, who endeavoured to instil a missionary vision in the young children. This is evident from Missionary 17's story:

The pastor's wife was our young teenage girls' Sunday school teacher. She was young, she was beautiful, her husband expressed his love for

¹⁶ The mission board gave the prospective missionary 27 practical advice on how to testify in the churches she visited: 'It will be well that you visit some congregations and ladies societies in Saskatchewan before you leave. Yes, it is true, you cannot tell people much as a missionary, but you can tell about your call to mission work and your spiritual pilgrimage thus far, and also share something of what you have read about non-Christian people's condition.' (AD 52)

her, and for us it was romantic; we liked it. She would pray in Sunday school every Sunday, 'Oh God that you might lay your hands on the lives of these beautiful young girls and would call them into your ministry!' And I said inside myself, she's talking about me! And I didn't want to. And - she's talking about me. No! No, no, no, no! And it wasn't until a number of years later that – she was talking about me! She had some sense of - I don't know what.

The following account by Missionary 11 who grew up as a Methodist before she married a Mennonite shows that such romanticised missionary notions were not Mennonite-specific:

M.S.: Did you ever have any interest in missions as a girl?

(Missionary ...): Yes I did! I wrote a letter when I was twelve years old to the Methodist mission; the Methodist mission had a head quarters in New York. And I was a twelve year old girl on the farm. Very, very active in church and I wrote a letter to them, wondering what I would need to do to be a missionary. And they answered this twelve year old farm girl and said, 'This is a wonderful interest that you have, but you are going to need schooling in order to go overseas and be a missionary overseas; you are going to need quite a bit of schooling, and quite a bit of preparation.'

Clearly, these romantic notions about the missionary call were largely unrealistic, and would need to be adjusted in order for the call to become a true support factor in their eventual mission experience. Besides romantic notions there were other similar motives mixed into the development of the sense of call. One of them was the desire 'to help' those with great spiritual, physical and material needs in far away places. This motive was especially found among girls. As a child Missionary 11 for example was touched, intrigued and spurred on to help by the plight of people on the mission field:

At that time in my mother's Sunday school class, she had contact with the Philippine islands. (...). And she had letters and ways in which our children in our church could help people in the Philippines, and we were doing things, and getting money, and getting little packages ready to send to the Philippine islands. And I really don't know how she got the contact, but already as a little girl, my mother in her Sunday class was giving her Sunday school children the idea of helping people who weren't in our

country but who had very big needs, and they lived in other countries. And I think that may have even been the beginning (of the sense of call).

At another point in the interview she re-iterated her early desire to help:

M.S.: What did you think you would do in missions?

Missionary 11: Well to be helpful that was for sure! And tell them about the love of Jesus, and the stories, New Testament stories of Jesus and his teachings. I think I thought of a teaching ministry. I wasn't sure, of course.

We find a similar desire to help on the following application form:

Q: What influences have been most influential in leading you to consider this form of service?

A: Missionaries' messages, books of missionary experiences, Desire to be of help (...) to the unfortunate. Articles on need in foreign lands in 'Mennonite'.¹⁷

Missionary 5's desire to help was of a somewhat different nature. She was not particularly impressed by the more dramatic missionary presentations, but she felt empathy with people's everyday struggles:

Some of these missionaries showed pictures with huge sores and amputated limbs and things like that. I felt that that was a little melodramatic or something. That didn't seem as real as the practical food and safety – I think security. Imagine people living with the fear of being killed, shot, guns; that seemed so awful! Look at living here, to think that your next door neighbour would shoot you and this kind of thing.

This desire to help was mixed into the sense of call for many, and was, as we will see, often transferred into the adult implementation of the sense of call. In this context we need to remember the personal response to the need of others, the strong propensity for 'helping' and serving that underlies the Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of discipleship. The danger exists that women who enter foreign missionary service primarily on the strength of

¹⁷ Missionary 38, AD 39

their desire to help will soon be confronted with the reality that the needs of the field will always exceed their ability and resources to address them.

From Resistance to Acceptance

Both the archival and the oral evidence indicate that those with a traditional sense of call, often accepted their sense of call only gradually. The call was seldom experienced as the proverbial handwriting on the wall. This statement by Missionary 40 on how her desire to go to into missions had developed is therefore rather a-typical:

The Lord revealed it to me through a vision.¹⁸

The women's eventual assurance that they were really called often involved an internal journey that usually moved from resistance to yielding. At first sight this seems a rather unexpected finding considering that at that time the missionary vocation was counted among the highest Christian callings. Expectations, therefore, would be that the recipients of the call would be overjoyed at having been divinely selected for such high honour. For some this was the case. Yet there is strong reference, particularly, but not exclusively, in the older written evidence, where many displayed an initial reluctance to 'accept' the call. Many of the early missionaries tended to have a strong feeling of inadequacy in the light of their high calling. This contrasts with the later generation who tended to enter missions on the strength of their gifting. A comprehensive early missionary testimony, (entitled 'Separated unto the Gospel of God. - Or My Missionary Testimony,') which is stored at the Bethel College archives, vividly illustrates the internal struggles one candidate underwent, before she was prepared to 'yield' to the call. She told of different occasions during which she increasingly felt the Lord might be calling her personally. On the first occasion during an evangelistic meeting in church she had an initial sense that the Lord might be calling her:

When I was eighteen, a missionary-minded preacher conducted union evangelistic meetings in our church. On consecration night I went forward to surrender my life to the Lord. (...) We were admonished to do something about it – to prepare for missionary service so we would be ready if the Lord should call us, However I did not believe that God would actually call me, and so I did nothing about it. (...) During all those years I also had a great interest in missions from the 'long distance' point of view. (...)

¹⁸ AD 57

On the second occasion during a mission presentation about she decided to wait for a clear divine call from God to go to Africa:

In the autumn of 1942, in Mission Class, a missionary from Africa showed motion pictures portraying the needs of his field, the Lord touched me in that service, and I felt I should say, 'I'll go to Africa unless you will lead me elsewhere,' but I continued to say, 'I'll go to Africa if You will call me.'

(...) In Jan., 1943, I sent a letter to my brother, Paul, who was then in the C.P.S. Camp at Medaryville, Ind. Quite frankly and fully I wrote about the Lord's dealings with me, and that I believed He was calling me to Africa. (...) Paul was not to let the others in the family know about the letter. In the spring of 1943 (...) he spent a short time at home. Mother was to put away his things, including his letters. Although mother does not read our letters otherwise, she 'happened' to read that letter. She placed it among my things and I found it later when home on a vacation. (...)

After another series of challenges she finally felt ready to follow her sense of call to Africa, unless the Lord would clearly lead otherwise:

In Dec., 1943, one of the faculty members gave a consecration message in Home Prayer Band. (...) He added that many who should be on the foreign field are not there. The message 'struck home' but still I did not yield. The following day, the missionary who brought pictures on Africa in the fall of 1942, spoke in Missions Class. His address deepened my conviction that I was one whom the Lord wanted on the foreign field. Two days later he again showed his pictures on Africa, this time in Missionary Union. After the meeting one of my friends (who is in the Missionary Course incidently (sic)) asked me, 'Well, are you going to be a missionary now?' As usual I replied, 'I don't know.' After a moment I told her that I felt the Lord wanted me to say to Him, 'I'll go to Africa unless you will lead me elsewhere.' She instantly replied, 'Why don't you?' If he doesn't want you there, He certainly will not let you go there.'

That night, Sat., 4th, 1943, just before retiring at 11, as I was on my knees, I finally surrendered to the Lord's will for my life by saying, 'I'll no longer say, I'll go to Africa if You will call me, but I, Lord, I'll go to Africa

unless You will lead me elsewhere.' A peace and joy such as I had not known for a long time flooded my soul immediately.

She felt affirmed in her decision by her family's positive reaction:

In two weeks I went home for my Christmas vacation. It was as hard for me to tell my parents and sisters about my decision as it had been easy to tell my friend in school. Finally I told them all about the Lord's leading and my surrender. All were quiet for a few minutes, then mother said, 'I'm not surprised, Anna. In fact I've been watching you for a long time and I've been expecting this. Before you were born I gave you to the Lord to be a missionary if He could use you, and He took me at my word.' All of us were in tears, and I at once steeped (sic) out of the house and cried to the Lord, 'Why was I so stubborn. Why did I wait so long to yield?' On the evening of the 4th I had been sure, but now I became doubly sure that the Lord indeed wants me to be a missionary.¹⁹

Occasionally applicants provided glimpses of what exactly made accepting the call difficult for them. Besides a general sense of personal inadequacy what is evident is their fear of not being able to cope with the challenges of missionary life, because of their fearful personal disposition, and the daunting prospects of having to leave their familiar surroundings:

It troubled me at first, for I was a timid child and the thought of going so far away frightened me. I used even to pray that the Lord would let me serve Him on this side of the water, (...).²⁰

Missionary 26 struggled with the idea of giving up a much loved job:

After graduation I went into general duty nursing and later into surgery. I feel that the Lord definitely prepared me for future service through these years of practical experience. I found it very hard to leave my nursing duties, which I had learned to love, and take up Bible Institute studies.²¹

¹⁹ Missionary 32, AD 6

²⁰ Missionary 29, AD 14

²¹ AD 9

Missionary 7 described having to sacrifice a potential marriage to her sense of call as a serious challenge:

I could have got married but I didn't find someone that was committed to being a missionary, so I didn't do it. And that was a little of a major decision when I decided to go to Bible school. The guy that I was really interested in, madly in love with when I was seventeen, he was going to be a farmer which I respect and they probably helped support me.

A further hurdle to yielding to the sense of call was that, in contrast to more recent practices, the earlier missionaries were expected to make the missionary call a life time vocation. This is reflected in the following question included on an application form:

*Do you propose to enter Foreign Mission work for life, if the Lord so wills?*²²

The women also had to overcome their difficulty to accept the call to go 'anywhere.' Many describe arriving at a point of accepting this call to go 'anywhere' as a critical turning point, which they most often refer to as reaching a point of 'yielding.' Applicant Missionary 24 expressed her eventual obedience response, which was no longer limited by geography, with the words of Isaiah's classic biblical response to the divine call, 'Here am I, send me':²³

*When I was 14 years of age, I said to the Lord, 'Here am I, send me.' Since that time I have felt that possibly the Lord would want me in a foreign field. As I became older, I became more convinced that the Lord wanted me in foreign mission service.*²⁴

Missionary 26 recounted how it took a traumatic event in her life to eventually bring her to this point of yielding. Although she had been willing 'to serve the Lord' before, her resistance revolved around her unwillingness to go 'anywhere,' which eventually was replaced by an acceptance to go 'where-ever:'

As stated (...) my interests were directed to Africa while attending tabor college (sic). It did not enter my mind that the Lord would have me in

²² Cf. for example AD 57

²³ Cf. Isaiah 6,8

²⁴ AD 7

missionary service. I did want to serve the Lord but was not willing to go any where (sic) for Him. While in my second year in nurses training (1941) the Lord spared my life in a car accident. My aunt who was in full time service for her master was killed; this was too much for me, to think that I who did nothing for Him was spared, and one who was so faithful in His service was taken with no one to take her place. The Lord spoke to me through Paul in Romans 12:1,2. I yielded my life to him for full time Christian service where-ever He could use me.²⁵

The archival sources, particularly the application forms, make proportionally more mention of the women's initial reluctance to 'yield' to the call, than do the oral ones. Besides the more stringent conditions, *i.a.*, the call as a life time commitment, the difficulties of long distance travel, greater health risks, to mention just a few, one possible explanation for this is that at the time of their application, these internal struggles were still vivid in their minds. For the interviewees, with their predominantly retrospective view however, they had lost much of their immediate importance.²⁶ These struggles do however show that no matter how strongly the call to follow, or to leave, formed part of the women's faith culture, their own leaving for an uncertain future did not lose its painfulness especially for the older generation missionaries.

For the younger mission generation their sense of call often developed along different lines. Firstly, some of them were reluctant to speak about a personal, specific mission call altogether. One younger interviewee, Missionary 1, who had grown up in a 'traditional' Mennonite home did not have a dramatic sense of call in the traditional missionary sense. Instead she entered missionary service on the basis of her life motto:

... you go where God leads you.

She had grown up in a 'traditional' Mennonite home and integrated her short term mission assignment into the overall history of journeying of the Old Testament people of God and of her Mennonite ancestors:

²⁵ AD 9

²⁶ Overall these concerns were very similar to those of the 19th century missionary Ann Hasseltine who 'wrestled over feelings of religious duty, over her attachment to her family, and her dread of suffering alone in a foreign land;' the original worries of Harriet Atwood about becoming a missionary, which mainly consisted of having to leave her 'every temporal mercy,' and her friends; and the initial objections of Sarah Davis, of having to leave her friends and family, (All quoted in American women in Mission, p.19).

I mean (the call to missions) wasn't like it dawned on me or anything. It was just everywhere and that was maybe like Hebrews says, Abraham didn't have a land that was his own, he was a wanderer, and he went where God chose and told him to go. And I think that our whole background, our ancestors weren't missionaries, they were wanderers too. There is no land that is their own. You go where God leads you.

Her testimony ties in with that of other younger missionaries who, instead of referring to a personal traditional missionary call, preferred to speak of their sense of call to service, or to discipleship, which could be lived out anywhere, including in a foreign mission setting.

Tools of Discernment

Especially those with a traditional missionary call looked for signs of confirmation that authenticated their stirrings of a sense of call. Many viewed an ensuing sense of joy and peace, after they had finally overcome their inner resistance, as a significant indicator that they were within the Lord's will. This is illustrated by the following archival testimony:

I finally surrendered to the Lord's will for my life (...). A peace and joy such as I had not known for a long time flooded my soul immediately.²⁷

Occasionally prospective missionaries were wary of being over-eager to enter missions. One such candidate eventually based her assurance of being within the Lord's will on the ceasing of her inner restlessness once she had committed herself to mission work:

I was thinking a great deal about the problem of my life work, for I didn't intend to teach for very many years. The words of a minister at Conference made me ponder even more. He said that some people miss their calling and try to preach when they were called to plow. He also said that one ought not try to preach if he can be happy in any other kind of work. I thought that would apply to a missionary as well. So I tried to be happy in my work as a teacher, but somehow I could not be satisfied with it.

(...) Although I believe that a public school teacher has a real opportunity to work for Christ, my heart is still restless to be in full time service for Him. Now I am sending this application, and though I am not

²⁷ Missionary 32, AD 68

*worthy of such a high appointment I know that Christ is able to help me do whatever he would have me to do.*²⁸

A further popular discernment tool was the open and closed door method. The women often decided to proceed with their missionary plans, praying that God would 'close doors,' if they should have misunderstood his will. The following is an oral illustration of how Missionary 11 and her husband applied this particular discernment method:

The call wasn't like the big handwriting on the wall. It was more a steady growing earnest conviction that we should go and offer ourselves to missions overseas. And we said, 'well, there are open doors, and there are closed doors.' We didn't have any big dramatic call from God. But something had been working in me I think from little girlhood up. And we decided if there were health problems, then the door would be closed. You always had to take a physical exam. So we did that and we were healthy, and we began conversing with the executive secretary of Congo Inland Mission, which is now 'Africa Inter Mennonite Mission.' And he worked with us, and by the time (my husband) had finished seminary, we were preparing to go to Africa as full time and career missionaries. But I'm sure that this had to be the leading of the Lord. For (my husband) in central Illinois, and his small town there, and me on the farm, meeting at Taylor University, at this Christian university, and feeling that we wanted to give our lives together to missions. I think the hand of the Lord was on me way back as a little girl on the farm guiding me, and we wound up in Africa!

Both methods, using feelings and special signs as tools of discernment, have their theological roots outside of Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition. They are more typical of the fundamentalist-revivalist custom, and alien to original Anabaptism/Mennonitism, which typically used more sober tools such as reading the word of God, and practical obedience. In addition they represent an individualistic approach to the discernment process with a distinct lack of reference to the community in the procedure. This individualistic approach too is suggestive more of the fundamentalist/revivalist tradition, than of distinctive Anabaptist/Mennonite practices, where the body of Christ habitually plays an important part in decision-making.

²⁸ Missionary 29, AD 14

Some dangers inherent in such an individualistic discernment process were raised in a pastoral context by Missionary 6 who at one point had been in charge of the spiritual/emotional wellbeing of women missionaries:

M.S.: You suggested that it might be helpful (...) if other people confirmed the call?

Missionary 6: Yeah right! I think that is part of our Mennonite heritage too, the community of believers, the affirmation of others. And some of the people that have had the biggest struggles in missions, I think, were those who came without much previous experience, and without a lot of affirmation from others that this is what they should do.

In practice this communal aspect of the discernment process was partly taken over by the mission board who, even though they asked for testimonials from the candidate's home churches, clearly were at a disadvantage compared to a local congregation, as far as their intimate knowledge of the candidate.

The early mission board's assessment followed some rudimentary procedures, which largely depended on the spiritual discernment of lay board members, constituted into a 'Candidate Committee.' This is evident from the following verbatim letter dating from the 1950s, written by a past secretary of the GC Mission Board, to Missionary 19 and her husband. It *i.a.* lists some spiritual and practical indicators the board used in its attempt at discerning a sense of call. These included a record of the candidate's major faith experiences, their theological beliefs, the state of their health, character references, which usually included an assessment by the applicant's minister, and where possible it included a personal interview with the candidate:

Dear Brother and Sister (...):

Your letter of May 9 came last night. It is true I did not explain the procedure of the Board of Missions with respect to how missionaries are called. I took too much for granted. The steps are as follows:

- 1. An expression by writing or orally of a person who feels the call of the Lord to become a missionary. This expression is made to our office where the name then is registered, and a form called 'Preliminary Information Blank' is then sent to the person. If the person is already advanced in preparation, and a field is definitely open, then*

2. *Forms on Christian Experience and theological views are sent; with two forms on physical health; and requests for references.*
3. *The reference forms, usually three, are then sent to those suggested by the candidate, or also to others. When all of 1,2, and 3 are filled in and back in our office, then*
4. *All material is sent to the Candidate Committee which is a committee of four within the Board. These four carefully examine all these filled out forms and the statements made by the candidate,*
5. *If at all possible, the candidate is called in person before the Candidate Committee. (As I say, if at all possible, because sometimes this calls for so much traveling that it seems not advisable, and the Candidate Committee comes to a recommendation without actually having an interview with the candidate.)*
6. *The Candidate Committee then makes its recommendation to the whole Board if a Board meeting is near; or to the Executive Committee of the Board. (The whole Board meets once a year. The Executive Committee four times a year.) The next Executive Committee meeting is to be in Chicago, June 24. The next whole Board meeting may this year be in Oregon at Conference; but surely in December at annual Council of Board meeting.*
7. *The whole Board or the executive Committee has then the authority to place the missionary candidate where they see the finger of God pointing. There have been disappointments in this, because some candidates feel they should go to that or that field, and the Noard (sic) says 'There is the greatest need.' Those candidates who have trusted the Board have to my knowledge later acknowledged that the Board expressed the will of God.²⁹*

Even in the light of these carefully laid out steps by the mission board, Missionary 6, the missionary counsellor mentioned previously, advocated caution and observed that on occasions the board might be misled by the applicant's strong sense of calling:

²⁹ AD 51

I would say it is important to have a sense of call. However, there have been times in our broader experience working with missionaries, where sometimes people will come, and they say, 'The Lord has called me, I have a clear cut call,' and yet they don't work out. (...) Because they have this 'call,' the mission board goes along and sends them there. It doesn't always work out.

Two past mission secretaries, each very experienced in screening prospective missionaries, took differing approaches to this task. One, a former GC Mission secretary emphasised primarily the importance of formal education. He wrote to a prospective candidate:

Seminary training is not a hard and fast prerequisite for a candidate to be accepted, but our Board has found through the years, and experienced missionaries heartily agree to that, viz. that no preparation is too good for the Lord's cause. One of the outstanding examples of this is your brother (...). He took the full four years graduate course in Los Angeles Bible School, which gave him practically a B.A. in theology. Then he went to the University and claimed no bible credit, but took a full four years course in liberal arts. Now, in a word, (your brother) is a well prepared missionary.³⁰

This approach differs fundamentally from that of the early Anabaptists, who relied more on pneumatic empowerment, faith and the word than on formal education, which in fact they viewed with suspicion. In contrast Jim Bertsche, a recently retired *AIMM* secretary, with extensive experience in the screening of applicants, primarily relied on his spiritual intuition for discernment. Among others he tried to distinguish mere enthusiasm from an authentic sense of call. In his view enthusiasm was a humanly generated eagerness that focuses predominantly on often unrealistically positive expectations of a future missionary life.³¹

The idea of going overseas and living in a different culture, there are some people that appeals to. How exciting it would be to live in Africa, think of it! All the zebras, and the giraffes, and the seven foot dancers, and the water and all these exotic things, and the waterfalls, and, the

³⁰ AD 51

³¹ This is partly born out by our findings in the section on the early development of the call which deals with romantic notions about life in missions.

game parks, (...) and tropical food, and all the rest of it. It's easy, if they are people who have a kind of adventurous spirit, and enjoy travel, and are curious to see how other people live. The idea of mission service, just on the surface of it, can have a certain appeal.

He juxtaposed such humanly generated enthusiasm with a true sense of call, which he defined as the human response to a divine summons:

Being curious about another culture, and being interested in travel, that's one thing. A sense of call, has to do with a deep inner conviction, that grows over time, that God Himself nurtures, and being brought to a place, where you just have this inner certainty, that if it's compared with all the other options that might be open, this is the one, and to volunteer for mission service afterwards. It's answering an inner conviction that can almost become an inner compulsion: This is God's leading in my life, and is something I have to respond to.

Missionary 6, the senior missionary, expressed similarly that a true sense of calling is characterised by 'a quiet inner commitment' rather than by great exuberance:

I think a sense of call is important, but it has to be more of a quiet inner commitment. Not this - I had this vision and God called me to this particular place, and I have to go there, even though nobody else really feels the person is gifted to go there.

Jim Bertsche observed that on the mission field the true call is further characterised by perseverance in the face of adversity:

And when this (true calling) is the case, then when the adventure wears thin, when there are jiggers under your toenails, and mosquitoes are biting, the language comes hard, there is this rock, a certainty that you are where you ought to be, so get on with it.

During the screening process he attempted to discern a candidate's 'genuineness,' which manifested itself rather in the integrity of the candidate's day to day relationship with the caller than by their focus on the call itself; to see

if there was a genuineness that came through, and the excitement not so much about going overseas as about walking with the Lord.

In order to prevent people from entering missionary service on the mere strength of their enthusiasm the board tried to ensure that the candidates had more realistic expectations of life on the mission field:

At some point we would try and sketch for them the reality of overseas service, and point out, that living in the bush, there is isolation, and there are not utilities, and there are not the amenities, there is not the convenience store around the corner, and there you'll have to make do with what you have. (...) Sometimes I think we may have almost overdrawn the negative sides and the difficulties, because we felt a dose of reality was better at the home end than if they are over there. We also tried to steer them to any missionaries that were on furlough. We had them share, speaking openly about their experience.

While many of these components of the development and discernment of the call applied to men and women alike, there were also some female-specific aspects connected to the issue.

Gender and Discernment

It was official mission policy that every woman should have her own personal sense of call. Oral evidence suggests that in reality this was not always the case, however. Rather they fell broadly into three categories described in this chapter under 'A Sense of Call – Yes or No.' Firstly, there was the majority who did witness to having had their own personal sense of call. Secondly, those who were vague about their own sense of call, but were able to positively integrate themselves by proxy into their husbands' sense of call. Thirdly, there were those who followed their husband's call against strong internal resistance, which they were never able to overcome.

Overall the archival and oral evidence indicates that couple dynamics often played a critical role in the development of their sense of call. As illustrated before, some women were prepared to forgo marriage, if a potential partner did not have a call to missions. There is no evidence that the male partner was ever prepared to follow the female partner's sense of call to mission, without having one himself. In many cases the decision to enter missionary service developed jointly, with both partners witnessing to a personal sense of call. However, even in such cases a potential marriage was sometimes jeopardised if the

couple could not agree on the specifics of that call. Missionary 9 for example told of such a disagreement between her and her potential marriage partner:

He stopped on the road and he asked me if I would marry him. And he thought I would say yes right away, and I didn't! And so I said to him, (and I thought he would say yes and he didn't), 'Will you go with me to India'? And he didn't say yes. He looked at me and said, 'Will you go with me to Africa'? So we decided there is no geography with God. And the Lord knows that we are committed to foreign service.

In this case both had equally strong but divergent convictions concerning the geographical particulars, but succeeded in reaching a consensus, where neither dominated the other. They did this by re-focussing from the specifics to the general nature of their sense of call. Another women, Missionary 5, substituted her lack of a personal sense of call to foreign missions with her more general sense of call to nursing, which could be constructively incorporated into her husband's strong and specific sense of call to missionary service in Africa:

I started going with my husband when we were seniors in high school. And he had a strong sense of call to Africa. I didn't have a strong sense of call, but I had a sense of wanting to do something with - I trained to be a nurse. So I had a strong sense of wanting to do something in nursing. And so my call was not a thunderbolt kind of a thing. It was that we were going to get married, and yes, we would probably be going to Africa, that's where he felt a strong sense of call. I never felt a strong sense of call, but in studying, understanding what was going on in Africa, I felt a sense of call to work in maternal and child health.

Although this woman did not have a personal sense of call to foreign missions as such, she would probably have interpreted her missionary activities as an integral part of her primary call to service, and to discipleship.

Missionary 18 had a similar general 'feeling of call and commitment,' which although not constituting a clear call to missions, included 'definitely considering mission work.' This seemed to enable her to adapt to her husband's more specific sense of call to foreign missions in Africa:

I was definitely considering mission work. But my husband was committed to missions. At that time the Mennonites had a seminary in Chicago. My

father was associated with that as well as being a pastor. And so my husband was a student there. And that's how we met. And he was definitely committed to the Congo, and because he was a Canadian he had French. And so he definitely felt a call to the Congo, and that agreed with my feeling of call and commitment. And so we went to Congo.

Missionary 21 submitted to her husband's sense of call on the strength of the motto of the biblical character Ruth, 'where you go I will go.' She seemed to succeed in applying this approach repeatedly without suffering from any long-lasting feelings of resistance and resentment:

M.S.: Do you feel (God) led you to Africa too?

Missionary 21: I'm sure that (my husband) would feel much more that he was led to Africa than I would. But yeah you can't always say, 'Yes, I was led! Africa was the place I wanted!' – and there are some people that do feel like that!

M.S.: But not everybody does.

Missionary 21: No! I would go 'Where thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge.' And the thing that's always been, we have always had really good experiences. So where ever God has led (my husband) my experience was good too.

Missionary 15 also did not have a personal sense of call to foreign missions, particularly not to Africa:

M.S.: Did you ever feel you had a call from God to go into missions?

Missionary 15: Not necessarily, not to Africa! I mean that wasn't my thing really!

Unlike the previous women she did not constructively integrate her husband's sense of call into her own situation. This resulted in seriously negative consequences for her mission experience.

Missionary 14, who never fully came to terms with missionary life as a woman who had followed her husband's calling, spoke almost exclusively about her husband's sense of call when asked about her own:

'Africa Inter Mennonite Mission.' (...) found out that (my husband) had this training (in administration), and the doctors in Zaire in the Congo were so tired of doctoring all day long, and doing all the paper work. They

needed an administrator. And so they contacted (my husband) and we interviewed for that and it was (my husband's) idea that we go! I drug my feet for a while, and finally I said that if that's where he wants to go that's where I will go too.

Her reluctance to speak about the topic in personal terms might be an indication that even retrospectively she had not yet been able to successfully process the trauma attached to it.

Ambiguities of the Sense of Call

Especially in the long term the effects of the sense of call are not as clear cut as I had expected when I set out on my investigation. Many women felt sustained by their sense of call. Statements like the following by Missionary 33 and Missionary 2 were frequently encountered:

I'm happy to be in Congo and have a real peace and joy in being in the land of His choice for me.³²

(Having a sense of call) was very important!

Yet the call did not always act as a support factor. The question therefore arises: What were some of the factors that could turn the sense of call into a burden?

Three important aspects that strongly influenced its role as a burden or blessing are the women's adult view of the caller, the contents the women assigned to the call, and the way they viewed themselves. Their pre-mission adult views of the caller are documented on their application forms and application blanks.

The Doctrinal Caller

A Remote Doctrinal God

Doctrinally the remote God of their youth remained just that – remote. Missionary 26's answer found on an application form by the *Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Mission Board*, that had found its way into the GC archives, dealt with the subject directly. She described God the Father in the mainly remote terms of his personal attributes, without any reference to a personal involvement with humankind:

³² Missionary 33, AD 24

I believe in One God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (II Cor. 13, 14) God possesses the attributes of personality, and therefore is a Person. He is Omniscience, (1John 3:20) Omnipotence, (Job 42:2) Omnipresence, (Psa. 139: 7-12) and eternal (Rev 1:8)³³

The same candidate in her statement on the trinity describes God the Father as the invisible, i.e., remote God, who correlates with the world through Christ and the Holy Spirit:

I believe in One God, eternally existing in three persons Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, (Matt. 28:14, 20) The Father is all the fulness (sic) of the Godhead invisible, (John 1:18).

The Son is all the fulness (sic) of Godhead manifested, (John 1:14-18). The Spirit is all the fulness (sic) of the Godhead acting immediately upon the creature. (1 Cor. 2:9,10)³⁴

Another candidate notes that besides dealing with humankind through Christ and through the Holy Spirit God the Father reveals himself through Scripture:

I believe that God reveals himself through the Bible (...) The Bible also reveals God's will for man.³⁵

She then continued by describing God's redemptive purpose mediated through Christ:

Thru man's sin, man fell, but thru the grace of God which came thru the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, man is restored to God's favor. (...) The New Birth is that miracle of transformation whereby man is brot (sic) into the Kingdom of God. It is God's part in salvation; our part is the acceptance of Christ as our personal Savior.³⁶

While divine grace is stressed in the statements, other divine aspects such as his love, compassion, and mercy are largely absent from the women's relatively austere and distant doctrinal concept of God. It has to be kept in mind, though, that the doctrinal statements were probably learnt by most in parrot fashion, and many of the missing attributes such as love,

³³ AD 9

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ GC application form, Missionary 18, undated

³⁶ Ibid.

compassion, etc., are traditionally ascribed predominantly to God the Son. This makes the women's view of Christ all the more important.

Christ Saviour and Role Model

As was to be expected based both on the women's early theological formation, and on the theological stance of the mission agencies, a large majority of applicants placed their primary doctrinal Christological emphasis almost exclusively on the salvific role of Christ:

Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Redeemer. "For there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.) He has redeemed us, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with His precious blood as of a lamb without blemish or without spot. "Without shedding of blood is no remission of sin." Heb.9:22. We cannot merit salvation through a good moral life, good works, or church membership. It is a gift of God received by faith in the finished work of Christ.³⁷

I believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, was born of a virgin, and is truly God and truly Man. (Matt, 1:18) He was first and foremost the world's Saviour and Redeemer. – Christ died for our sins (1Cor. 15:1)³⁸

From a pastoral perspective this traditional Protestant view of the divine caller and its emphasis on redemption as the sole work of the crucified Christ, without linking it to any form of human effort beyond receiving it as the free gift of grace represents a strong potential support factor insofar as it opens the door for releasing them of the burden of proving their worthiness, and of the burden of lasting feelings of guilt in the face of failure. This only applies, however, if the missionaries personally grasp this significance of divine grace for themselves.

However, their view of Christ is also of some pastoral concern insofar as the women doctrinally portrayed Christ mainly as the triumphant Christ who had overcome death and who in turn saves the believers from eternal condemnation. Absent from their description is a mention of the suffering Christ. Such a triumphalist view is one-sided and therefore unrealistic in the sense that it neglects the painful aspects of the practical suffering entailed in Christ's ministry on earth and by implication the painful aspects of suffering as part of the human experience. It does not prepare the future missionaries for personal and missionary failure and the accompanying feelings of inadequacy and guilt.

³⁷ Missionary 2, AD 13

³⁸ Missionary 2, AD 13

While the fundamentalist-revivalist Christology clearly dominated the doctrinal answers, Christ was also described in traditional Anabaptist/Mennonite Christological terms.³⁹ One G.C. statement of faith, which the applicants needed to sign, contained the following Anabaptist/Mennonite Christological elements:

*We believe that Christ lived and taught the way of life as recorded in the Scriptures which is God's plan for individuals and the race, and that it becomes disciples of Christ to live in this way, thus manifesting in their personal and social life and relationships the love and holiness of God.*⁴⁰

The following Christological statement by an applicant similarly contains typical functional Anabaptist Christological characteristics of Christ as the perfect role model, which it combines with what applicant saw as Christ's primary role, namely that as Lord and Saviour:

*I believe that God the Father sent His son, Jesus, into this world to save men. Christ is an example of a perfect life, but He is more, He is also the perfect redeemer. God has a great love for man and this love moved Him to send His Son to this earth, Christ was willing to give Himself for the atonement of all. Now we may receive eternal salvation through Him.*⁴¹

The following section moves from the women's doctrinal views to their personal, experiential view of Christ.

He Supplies all my Needs

The applicants' statements on what Christ meant to them personally again reflected an emphasis on his role as their Saviour and Lord. Many then also expressed their desire to completely subject their lives to his lordship. The following statement is typical:

*He is my personal Savior and Master of my life.*⁴²

Depending on their interpretation of their acceptance of Christ as their personal saviour it has the potential to act as blessing or as burden. The blessing would be experiencing his

³⁹ Based on this Christology, this is how Missionary 8 understood her witness: 'I have tried to live a Christian life for others to see.' (AD 55)

⁴⁰ Cf. for example AD 67.

⁴¹ Missionary 28, AD 12

⁴² Missionary 38, AD 39

salvation as an ongoing offer that they continually claim for their human weakness. The burden would be viewing it as a single event on which they would have to build in their own perfection and strength. Similarly their acceptance of Christ's lordship implies that as missionaries they will attempt to submit to the caller rather than to follow their own inclinations. This potentially anchors their missionary calling in one that is bigger than them. However, the importance of Christ's lordship could turn into a burden if the missionaries should focus on Christ's commands as their standards to such a degree that they cease to feel and to acknowledge their human inability to attain them. This is why in the following section we investigate some of the women's pre-mission thinking on Christ's personal role in their weakness.

Many applicants, particularly of the older generation, ruefully contrast God's immutable and undeserved faithfulness with their own unworthiness:

*It has always been a marvel to me how patient + loving he is toward me as the least of 1.*⁴³

*(...) and if I have failed Him, He has never failed me.*⁴⁴

They had perceived Christ's faithfulness in their pre-mission lives through his provision for all their spiritual, emotional and physical needs. As a result one applicant described him, contrary to the doctrinal statements, in intimate terms:

*(He is) my dearest friend and guide in my work or whatever I do. He strengthens, gives wisdom and supplies my daily needs.*⁴⁵

Most of the earlier applicants were convinced that although they themselves were unworthy and weak, through Christ they would be able to overcome any adversity, as was the case with the following candidate:

*He is my all sufficient centre of life abundant, and in Him I live and move and by Him will Triumph.*⁴⁶

⁴³ Missionary 38, AD 39

⁴⁴ Missionary 41, AD 60

⁴⁵ Missionary 38, AD 39

⁴⁶ Missionary 41, AD 60

This view of Christ the caller and their relationship with him encouraged especially the earlier applicants to bravely, if somewhat naively, face potential missionary difficulties.⁴⁷ This is illustrated by the three following replies to the question 'How do you regard hardship, suffering and the danger as connected with the missionary life?'⁴⁸

*They are to be expected in a missionary's life and endured by the grace of God.*⁴⁹

*I know there are hardships, suffering and danger in a missionary's life. If the Lord sends us forth, he will meet the need. We are His, in His vineyard, serving Him and He will keep and give grace to bear hardships and suffering and shelter in time of danger. I realize that a missionary must trust the Lord completely and at all times.*⁵⁰

*Christ has promised grace for every need and His presence with us wherever we may be, so we need not fear for those things. He gave His all for us; we dare not do less for Him. (...)*⁵¹

These statements of trust in a caller who supplies all their needs were based on the relatively limited experience of the women's pre-mission lives. From these experiences they extrapolated for the future an expectation that through God they would be able to cope with any potential mission related adversity. These statements, although noble, lack a certain realism in their unqualified high expectations of both the divine and the human agents in missions.

While the women's view of Christ is expressed both in doctrinal and personal form, the Holy Spirit is only described doctrinally, indicating that the mission agencies and probably the applicants themselves, did not assign great importance to the personal experiential aspect of the Holy Spirit.

Work of the Holy Spirit

⁴⁷ This is also illustrated by the singing of the consecration hymn 'Go Labor on! Spend and be Spent' during the mission ordination service of Missionary 5 and her husband (AD 40).

⁴⁸ Missionary 36, AD 37

⁴⁹ Missionary 36, *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Missionary 26, AD 9

⁵¹ Missionary 29, AD 14

The Holy Spirit is viewed by the applicants as the member of the trinity that interacts most directly with the world, both Christian and non-Christian, through a dual ministry. Missionary 26 wrote on her application form:

I believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, is co-equal with God in all His attributes, and is sent by the Lord Jesus Christ from the Father, to convict the world of sin.⁵²

In addition his ministry is also to grow and equip Christians for service and to enable them to overcome sin:

... to regenerate, indwell, guide, and teach the believer and to empower him to live in victory over sin.⁵³

This dual ministry is similarly described in the statements by the following missionary:

In relation to humanity as a whole, the Holy Spirit reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement Jn. 16:8-11.⁵⁴

In relation to the believer, the Holy Spirit regenerates, indwells, seals, infills (sic?), and empowers for service. The Holy Spirit is the guide of the believer's life⁵⁵

In theory this dual ministry of the Holy Spirit is of great importance to the missionary call. It emphasises the divine as opposed to the human act in salvation, in bringing the believer to maturity and in enabling for service. This implies firstly, that the primary source of the missionary's effectiveness in her service is not human effort, perseverance, competency, or sacrifice. Secondly, salvation, and spiritual growth of those to whom they minister are equally at their core a divine, and not a human work since it is the Holy Spirit and not the missionary who 'convicts the world of sin,' and 'regenerates the believer.' This doctrinal basis shifts, at least theoretically, the burden of achieving 'missionary success,' from the missionary to the divine, because it holds that at its core spiritual life can neither be humanly generated nor humanly developed and sustained. As will be shown later, the women's practical application

⁵² Missionary 26, AD 9

⁵³ Missionary 26, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Missionary 2, AD 13

⁵⁵ Missionary 2, *ibid.*

of this doctrinal 'theory,' or the failure to do so, becomes one of the critical factors, which determines if their sense of call acts as either a support or as an inhuman burden.

The Mandate

In keeping with the mission-historic framework we discussed in Chapter One the earlier generation of missionaries understood their personal mandate as obedience to their Lord and his divine will in general and to the Great Commission in particular.⁵⁶ Obedience to the Great Commission was frequently quoted as their motive on their personalised Prayer Cards:

The Congo Calls

Jesus says 'Go Ye'

Therefore

We must go Jn.9:4⁵⁷

The statements about the prospective missionaries' purpose illustrate this point further. They also imply the general air of assurance and *Sendungsbewusstsein* that was rooted in their view of themselves as having been entrusted to be executors of the *Missio Dei*. In addition some also wanted to share with others their own wonderful experience:

*Jesus said, 'Go ye ... and teach all nations.' By the grace of God I have heard the good news of salvation. I have received the Light and I am debtor to these who live in darkness –.*⁵⁸

From the Great Commission many missionaries and mission agencies deducted that saving souls was largely their personal responsibility. The following questions found on a GC application form explicitly refer to the human 'effort' of saving souls as the main task of the applicants on the mission field:

Q: Do you believe that personal effort to lead souls to Christ is the paramount duty of every missionary?

⁵⁶ Dana Robert's findings on the subject of the missionary motivation of 19th century evangelical Protestant women indicate that in this the early 20th century *CIM/AIMM* woman missionaries were no different from missionaries of main stream Protestant denominations. Cf. Dana Robert's discussion of the topic in her Section on 'Missionary Motivation and Gender in *American Women in Mission*, pp.24-36

⁵⁷ AD 4

⁵⁸ Missionary 29, AD 14

Missionary 40: Yes, I believe it is.

Q: Do you propose to make such effort the chief feature of your missionary career no matter what other duties may be assigned to you?

*Missionary 40: Yes*⁵⁹

Missionary 23 listed to 'save souls'⁶⁰ as one of her motives for applying for foreign missionary service:

*I believe it's God's will for my life, my desire to save souls and love for foreign peoples.*⁶¹

As alluded to before, such a view poses a temptation for the women to set themselves up the in their human frailty for the Herculean task of performing what are essentially divine acts, for which no amount of human effort would ever be adequate. We will later refer to this phenomenon as the revivalist-fundamentalist burden. In contrast, Missionary 41 showed in a letter written on furlough a heightened understanding of missionary work as divine work:

*I have been so deeply aware of the need for God to work through us and in us. We go back with all of these educational benefits and the very best that the system can provide in preparation. Yet if God does not work through us by His Spirit, reaching out to others through us, then these degrees and honors will be as 'tinkling cymbals.' We feel a deep need of His over-Lordship and enabling power.*⁶²

This approach focuses on the sender rather than on the call, and is more likely to safeguard against a missionary motivation which reduces missions largely to an anthropocentric endeavour, or to works. We find a similar sounding, yet apparently differently motivated mandate in the statement by Missionary 2 who shared the divine salvific concern for the world:

⁵⁹ Missionary 40, AD 57

⁶⁰ Missionary 40, in a letter from Congo, was motivated more by guilt: 'Many years ago God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel if he did not warn the wicked man of his evil way, to save his life, and the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, his blood will be required from thy hand. This is still an inspiration and a real cause to us today that we warn the wicked to turn from their wicked ways. That's why we are here, across the ocean, away from loved ones.' (AD 59)

⁶¹ AD 5

⁶² AD 65

At the time I dedicated my life to the Lord, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart concerning missionary service in Africa. This call became clearer in future years. In Bible school, through reports received directly from Africa, the burden for those benighted souls became great⁶³

This mandate seems to be motivated by a genuine concern rather than by a messianic drive, and sounds therefore more ‘relaxed,’ depending however, on who ultimately carries ‘the burden for those benighted souls.’

The women’s *Sendungsbewusstsein* is occasionally evident in their reports of missionary successes measured in terms of how many people had responded to the call of the Gospel, or how many tracts had been printed and handed out, etc. This has the potential to put the individual missionary and entire mission stations under heavy pressure. This need of having to produce tangible results is absent from the following two statements, the first one by an interviewee, who elaborated retrospectively on her sense of call, and the second by an experienced missionary at the beginning of a new assignment. Both women are primarily concerned with the act of witnessing and with practically demonstrating God’s love. These intentions are stated without direct reference to results:

My attention was drawn to share this message in a foreign country in view of fewer possibilities available for people to hear in these countries.⁶⁴

We feel that God is leading us and that you will be praying for us as you have been doing this year. With this assurance we go with joy and anticipation. We will be working in the development of the agricultural program of the ‘Congo Inland Mission.’ We are going to Congo to live natural Christian lives, to face problems, and with God’s help to try and solve them; to demonstrate the love of Christ through daily living.⁶⁵

These statements reflect a sowing rather than a producing mentality and have therefore a certain degree of restfulness about them.

Overall this older generation of missionaries indicated a high sense of responsibility and of duty, particularly towards their call and the caller. Their tasks were usually varied and manifold. As the policy of *CIM/AIMM* throughout was to prioritise evangelism and church

⁶³ AD 13

⁶⁴ Missionary 20, AD 47

⁶⁵ Missionary 5 and husband, AD 41

planting, they had to try and combine this role with their professional activities, such as nursing, teaching, etc., and often with their roles as wives and mothers. According to their application forms many women anticipated making their primary concern the practising of their professions. This they saw as an important means to fulfil their spiritual mandate.⁶⁶

*I hope, by means of medicine + God's word, to minister to the Souls + Bodies of those with whom I work – that they may be saved from sin, to an abundant Life in Christ.*⁶⁷

*It is my desire, first of all, to tell those who have never heard, about the Lord, so that they may learn to know the Lord Jesus Christ. This I would like to do through the medium of Nursing. Then, I would like to teach them how to prevent illness, and how to alleviate suffering after it has started in their bodies.*⁶⁸

Q: Kind of missionary service:

A: *Evangelistic, Educational*

Q: Why?

A: *Because I feel that is what He has been preparing me for*⁶⁹

In this respect the following applicant was an exception in the way she weighted the priorities of her mandate by positioning her family commitments above 'official' mission work:

Q: What type of work do you wish to do?

A: *House wife + mother – religious Ed. Possibly music*⁷⁰

Over time clearly identifiable shifts occurred in the missionaries' perception of their mandate. One such change was that the traditional missionary pursuits of evangelism and church planting, although still the official focus of *AIMM*, began to recede on the women's

⁶⁶ Their professions almost exclusively fell into the typical female helping domain of those days, such as education and health care, areas into which we know they had been steered in their youth by their families and communities.

⁶⁷ Missionary 18, AD 69

⁶⁸ Missionary 24, AD 7

⁶⁹ Missionary 33, AD 54

⁷⁰ Missionary 38, AD 39

list of priorities. In line with Lesslie Newbigin's analysis discussed in Chapter One, the traditional missionary mandate increasingly included a more humanitarian focus. Not only was this change in keeping with overall trends of the western churches' understanding of missions, but it also opened the doors for the Mennonite female missionaries to recover aspects of the traditional Anabaptist/Mennonite concept of discipleship and servanthood, which emphasise practical Christian witness rather than an overtly evangelistic approach. Missionary 5, a newly retired interviewee in her early sixties commented:

After the Second World War I think in our Mennonite church there was a strong emphasis on development.

The same interviewee, who had been brought up in a traditional Mennonite environment, described her understanding of her missionary mandate, which she felt had set her apart from many of her contemporaries. Her interpretation of meaningful mission work was primarily the practical application of her faith commitment:

I would say my call was very much a combination of my Christian faith being put to some practical use.

She also represented an emerging new missionary generation that openly added the satisfaction of self-actualisation and using one's personal gifting to their list of motivation for missionary service:

Somehow working in nursing, maternal and child health was what I enjoyed. I liked doing it. I had a lot of fun doing it. And basically I have always enjoyed what I was doing a lot. And so I guess for me a sense of call also means it's something you are attracted to, it's something that's rooted in your faith, and it's something that is a need. It needs to be that.

Missionary 8 described the new aspects of the missionary call which emphasised influencing others through by leading an exemplary life rather than overt evangelism in the following words:

If one is to teach and draw people to Christ then living discipleship is very important in every aspect of life. A good example is so important for influencing others.⁷¹

⁷¹ Missionary 8, AD 56

This view of the call ties in with the previously mentioned mission statement that that GC missionaries had to sign:

We believe that Christ lived and taught the way of life as recorded in the Scriptures which is God's plan for individuals and the race, and that it becomes disciples of Christ to live in this way, thus manifesting in their personal and social life and relationships the love and holiness of God.⁷²

In this mission paradigm, being a good disciple, being a good Mennonite, is essential for successful mission work. Such a view of the call places a potentially heavy Mennonite burden⁷³ on the missionary insofar as it makes missionary behaviour the basis for missionary success. Tied in with this view is the fact that the goal of such behaviour is to humanly 'persuade' rather than to rely on divine intervention.

The new elements of the missionary call were incorporated by Missionary 4, in her early forties, and by her husband. They contained a different set of Anabaptist/Mennonite elements insofar as it partly grew out of their critique of materialistic and imperialistic aspects of North American culture, and of the way missions had been done during the colonial era.⁷⁴

(My husband) had strong convictions about America in terms of their role in the Vietnam War. (...) And of course we were negative about America's role overseas in general, their foreign policy, but even more upset in terms of the multi-nationals and probably the arrogance of North America. (...) We also did a lot of critique in our training, (...) that I thought we were awfully negative in the ways missions had been done in the colonial era as well. And so we went wanting to break that cycle of colonialism in attitudes and everything, and we saw America as still doing that in a neo-colonialist way.

Missionary 1 in her early forties, who had grown up in a traditional Mennonite environment, did also not have a traditional sense of call to missions as such. She however agreed with the previous interviewee that her life in North America did not express her desire to

⁷² AD 67

⁷³ We will further develop this theme of the Mennonite burden at a later point in the thesis.

⁷⁴ At the same time it reflected the thinking of the 60s generation, and fell into the mission paradigm of the time.

meaningfully follow the divine call to discipleship and to counter-cultural living. In addition her mandate was partly guided by her gifting:

Missionary 1: It was when I was working at a printing press that my brother, who was overseas in Africa, asked me if I would be interested in coming to Africa. (...)

M.S. When he asked you how did you feel?

Missionary 1: I enjoyed my work, but I had been there for over six years, so I was ready for something different. I'm not sure if I was consciously praying to God, but I think I was unconsciously praying to God, 'What would you like for me to do now?' Because I also remember being at the printing press, I was doing the financial books, I was doing payrolls, I was paying everybody, and to me it felt like a very, very self-centred and a very consumerist life. It was those things that were not valued by my parents in my home! Money and prestige and those kind of things - they were not valued in my home. And so here I was doing all of these things. I just felt very self-centred and that didn't feel right to me in that way. And so I think I was praying, 'God, what would you have me do with the gifts that I have?' And so when my brother asked me, it felt to me like a door was opened. I didn't need to pray or think about that very often, it felt very right to me to do that.

She described her understanding of the short term mission service she was embarking on in the classic Mennonite term of service:

Missionary work for me means more Bible translation or Bible teaching or specifically religious work whatever that might be, evangelism or whatever. And service means more going (...) to help out how I could perhaps live a life that Jesus would want, but not to specifically do church related kind of work.

Missionary 4 illustrated that contained in the new sense of call was often an explicit appreciation of African culture, and the notion that it was easier to live a true Mennonite life in that setting:

We arrived in Africa definitely looking for a different culture than we had left. And we wanted to totally embrace a healthy way of living in a totality.

As much as we wanted to make a contribution in the religious or spiritual realm as evangelists, we wanted to take in from that culture a better way of living than what we saw in North America!

Such an attitude encouraged a strong motivation to integrate into the local culture. This is evident from Missionary 5's statement:

We've tried hard to learn some of the many lessons necessary to help us become a part of the church, community and society in which we live.⁷⁵

Missionary 1 indicated that in contrast to many of the earlier missionaries, who had often felt called to a specific continent, if not country, geography played a distinctly subservient role in the new understanding of the missionary mandate:

I don't know that I ever saw myself as going overseas, but I just saw myself as doing service wherever that might be. I didn't have a specific continent or location planned out, or desire where I wanted to go.

For this missionary and others the specific geographic call had been replaced to a large degree by the divine call to service and to live counter-culturally. This re-invested many women's sense of call with its traditional Anabaptist cosmopolitan quality. However, we will, at a later stage, discuss the fact that even those with this geographically more flexible sense of call did not function as human robots but they too had to – sometimes very painfully – deal with the human issue of change and of loss⁷⁶ attached to geographic and cultural re-location.

The Call and the Initial Cultural Re-Location

The sense of call had a deep effect on the women and when the time came for them to move to a new culture they were ready and motivated to face the cultural re-location. In spite of this, relocating from North America to Africa and back again was an emotionally and physically difficult experience, both for those with and those without a sense of call.⁷⁷ This we

⁷⁵ Missionary 5 and husband, AD 42

⁷⁶ The passing away of far away parents was among those often stressful losses. Missionary 33 wrote to the mission board: 'I very much wanted to make Sunday's Pan American flight out of Leo at 7p.m. (But) at 12 noon (...) there was a telegram telling me of mother's homegoing and advised me not to come. (AD 25)

⁷⁷ The journey itself was often hazardous particularly in the early days and during war times. The mission board informed missionary 40 that one missionary's departure for the mission field had been

will firstly demonstrate with regard to the North America - Africa leg of the journey.

Missionary 11, who had a strong traditional sense of call, told the following anecdote, which illustrates some of the 'hard' challenges she faced as a North American housewife in rural Africa:

Living was hard. We didn't dare to drink the water out of the streams, so we boiled our water and cooled it down. We had an old Coleman refrigerator, but it burned kerosene (...), and we had to learn to take care of that. I had a kitchen stove in my kitchen, and it burned wood. (...) We needed to get wood from the Africans, and they brought us wood, and we had to learn how to run that stove, and how much wood to put in to make it hot enough.

However, against all the odds, in her own words, she succeeded to 'adjust.' Of the role of her sense of call in this process⁷⁸ she said:

It helped me to adjust I think.

The fact that she was able to re-locate constructively is further illustrated by the way she had experienced an immediate attraction to the local young women, with whom she soon became professionally involved. This initial involvement eventually evolved into her long-term mission mandate, which was to develop a program for women:

I loved the women! I loved the women! And one of the first jobs they gave me in mission work was to be in charge of the girls' compound. When we first got to the Congo we found that the boys were being sent to the mission schools. They wanted their boys to have education. But their little girls – they did not see any use in it, because all they needed to know how to do was to cook, to go for water, and to go for wood, and to help take care of the children, because some day they would just marry and have

held up held up 'because of the attack on the Portuguese steamer by a submarine not long ago.' (AD 50). Missionary 37 related: 'We had a rather rough voyage. We would have been able to enjoy it more if we had had smoother sailing. Our greatest difficulty was that we did not have enough cargo, as a result we were floating on top. (AD 38)

⁷⁸ Missionary 22 and her husband wrote: 'We are all looking forward to our return to the Congo – realizing that conditions there will not be ideal, but believing that it is God's place for us.' (AD 66). Missionary 41 wrote similarly: 'It's good to be back in Congo again. This is my home and here is my work. I have great peace that this is God's place for me.' (AD 1)

their own babies. What did they need education for? Missionaries saw the need for girls to be educated. We saw that they would have better homes and better lives. And I was a part of that early pioneer group that was very, very active in helping parents in the villages see that 'you need your girls in the mission school!'

Missionary 2, also with a strong traditional sense of call, described some of her apprehensions especially regarding her small children, before and during her initial relocation to Africa:

M.S.: The last couple of months before you left the States, how did you feel?

Missionary 2: Apprehensive! Our daughter was four months old when we left the first time, and I was very concerned about her. Our son was just two years old. As I look back now I would say the adjustment was hard for him! But I think parents in those days just did what they were gonna do, and the kids just jolly well better do it too! It wasn't quite as accommodating to children as the society is today. We didn't take them into account perhaps as much as we did later. (...) Even mission boards give more attention to that now than they used to. But I can recall getting to Leopoldville and in the room we were given, there were salamanders or lizards climbing up the wall, and then they would suddenly just plop. And I had this little, beautiful baby there! And I worried how things would go. I guess there was a fair amount of apprehension.

However, she developed an immediate interest in the local language that she mastered soon. This resulted in her involvement in translation work, and eventually developed into her primary initial missionary mandate that she 'loved':⁷⁹

⁷⁹ We find a similar pattern of pointing out difficulties but moving on soon to the positive aspects of a situation in the archival material too, although it is easier to put on a brave face in a letter than in an oral testimony: 'I will be moving to Mutena at this time. While we will be lacking some of the conveniences there which we enjoy here (such as electricity) we should have much greater opportunity for contact with the people. I am looking forward to this. (Missionary 20, AD 46). Missionary 35 stated similarly: 'Twenty-four students take piano lessons with me. Other responsibilities are to teach Reading 'Riting and 'Rithmetic with grades three, four and five, also to have French in Lower Room, Upper Room and High School and then there is the junior Choir and the Senior Choir. To me it is a joy to be busy. As faculty members, we keep looking up for our daily supply of strength. (AD 34). We

I did translation. I loved learning the language! And I loved to do translation of Sunday school material or songs!

While these two women had had a traditional sense of call that involved a life time commitment, Missionary 1 joined mission service for a two-year assignment primarily on the basis of her sense of call to discipleship and to counter cultural living. She recounted her keen anticipation of African culture and of the spiritual experiences her mission service would entail. In her retrospective telling of the story this positive anticipation overshadowed any sentiments of 'being torn away' from home. As one of the new generation missionaries she was *i.a.* looking forward for what God would teach her through the African culture:

I don't remember feelings of being torn away from (home) as I left, I don't remember those kinds of feelings. I was looking forward to it as an adventure in what a new country, a new culture would teach me, but also an adventure in what God would teach me in a very different kind of setting. And so I went with a lot of anticipation and joy.

She had to deal with many challenges on account of her cultural re-location. These included dealing with strange languages, her fear of tropical diseases, an unscheduled change of job, and spiritual issues:

M.S.: Was it anything like you expected when you arrived on the other side?

Missionary 1: I don't think I could ever have expected it, but I think I also went with a clean slate, and so I accepted it as it was.

M.S.: What were your first impressions?

Missionary 1: On the very first day I went to the market with two other young women. And we had a downpour, and we just sat in the market and the African guy whose stall it was, he jabbered, and jabbered, and jabbered, and I couldn't understand a word that he said. And watching all the people go by, it felt like people were very warm to me, even though I couldn't understand

find a similar positive meta-narrative in the following letter excerpt, describing a couple's experiences in Brussels during language study: 'We can remember many frustrations and difficulties, but they are over-shadowed by the benefits we have received from living in and becoming part of another culture.' (Missionary 5 and husband, AD 41)

anything, and they were warm to each other. But then also, coming back to our house, water was running everywhere, and all I could think of was horror stories of these worms and these bad things that happen in Africa! And I was sure I would get some parasite that was just horrible!

M.S.: What was your assignment when you got there?

Missionary 1: When I first got there my assignment was to be a hostel parent. (...) I got there in August and by November one family of three children had to leave to go back to North America for health reasons. So that only left one child in the school and they decided not to keep the school running at that point, so he went back to his home village to his parents(...). At that point I went to the capital (...) to learn French. So my roles changed very drastically. When I think about those first six months that I was there and all the cultural adjustments, and the language adjustments, and job adjustments, learning, everything was really pretty amazing!

In hindsight she notes that, realistically, during this initial period on the mission field she had probably been under far more pressure than she had been conscious of:

All of those things in a very short time must have been incredibly stressful for me! I don't remember that as being a stressful time, but just in hindsight it had to be!

Her observation ties in with the overall evidence that many missionaries seemed to lack clear memories of emotional stress experienced during their initial re-location difficulties. Beside the fact that such memories probably faded over time, it might also have to do with the fact that the women were not consciously aware at the time of the stressfulness of many of their re-location experiences. This is likely particularly true of older missionaries, who lived in an era with relatively little awareness of psychological processes. However, we have to remember that even younger missionaries, as we know from the Early Socio-Religious Profile chapters, largely grew up in a no-nonsense rural Mennonite environment, where everybody was simply expected 'to get on with it.'

The re-location experiences we discussed so far indicate that those who had a personal sense of call, and who survived in the face of the many serious early challenges, usually successfully negotiated their initial re-location. One key factor in this process was that they had an outward-looking attitude and soon discovered a personal mandate.

However, there is also evidence that a strong sense of call could not always be equated with a successful initial re-location experience. This is noted in a well-documented

case of a young, single missionary with a strong traditional sense of call, who suffered debilitating burn out in her initial re-location phase, even though she and her spiritual advisers were convinced that the Lord had led her to become a missionary in Congo. Once arrived in Congo⁸⁰ she immediately proceeded to take up her teaching mandate and began to form bonds with the local population.

In the following letter she describes to the executive of the CIM home office the serious confusion, humiliation and sense of failure she experienced as she attempted to reconcile her strong sense of call with her inability to cope with the practical challenges of being a missionary. These challenges included teaching very big school classes, a task for which she 'never felt adequate,' and which 'wasn't always easy:'

I want to warn you right from the start that you will not be very proud of this, my first quarterly report. As you know, I arrived at (my station) Sept. 6. After a week of getting settled and observing in the classes, I started teaching 6th and 7th grades. It was a real joy to teach 75 eager Africans and soon, very soon, I felt so attached to them. However, I never felt very adequate in my teaching but the Lord undertook day by day. Then in the middle of Nov. my health started failing, At first we thought it a minor thing but before I knew it, I was unable to teach any longer. (Dr. Jim Diller) passed that way from Charlesville. He said that I must take a rest, 'A rest! After two months of work!' I could hardly believe my ears and yet he was serious. In no time they had decided that I go along to (Mukedi) for 10 days of rest, I couldn't believe that this was the Lord's will for He had led so clearly in everything right up to the time that my feet touched Congo soil. I will not speak of the disappointment this was to me.

It wasn't long until I realised that this was of the Lord. Many spiritual battles have been fought since I left (Nyang) (sic), since I left my work that I enjoyed so thoroughly although it wasn't always easy, since I left my 75 boys (my 75 children).

Then (someone) was willing to give me lessons in Kipende and I thought perhaps this was why the Lord had brought me to (Mukedi). It was such a wonderful opportunity! But after a few lessons (Dr. Jim) said no

⁸⁰ Especially for the older generation missionaries their arrival in the Congo by plane, even after a prolonged preparation time, came as a shock in itself as the following statement indicates: 'Things happen so fast when one goes by aeroplane that it takes a while to realize the change that has taken place.' (Missionary 39, AD 48)

more Kipende and that I was to stay put. I'll admit that it wasn't very difficult to stay 'put.' There was nothing else I could do feeling as I did.

I feel as though I have failed you all. For 2 months I have been receiving wages and there is no output on my part. The doctors both say that I've been over-doing it. That's all, This is hard to take because you warned us so distinctly not to burn the candle at both ends upon arriving on the Mission field. But please believe me, I did not realise that that was happening, (Dr. Jim) finally said it probably wasn't only the 2 months here in Congo but an accumulation of the year in Belgium.⁸¹

The executive secretary of the mission agency wrote a letter to the woman's parents to reassure them that based on the young missionary's clear divine call, which had been evident to all, she should remain on the mission field. He was convinced that she would recover to eventually 'be a joyful missionary in the Congo.'

No doubt you have heard from (your daughter) in the Congo telling you that she is not well. This letter to you is to give you a word of comfort and assurance. We are all sure, you and (your daughter) too, that our heavenly Father called her to serve Him in the Congo. Her long years of preparation for that work have been blessed by our Lord, no question about that. One door after another opened for her.

Now when she came to the field of work, duties crowded in on her faster than any of us, including our missionaries on the field, had planned for her. The years of strain and now the newness of the field and the newness of the work itself overwhelmed her. What (she)) now needs is calmness, full assurance that she is where God wants her to be, and medical care with nurses on call. The missionaries are doing their best to provide the first, third and fourth conditions. The second you as parents can, and I am sure will, help her to realise anew.

I am speaking on behalf of our Board and on behalf of our CIM Board and our missionaries in the Congo, to please urge her to stay on the field at least for the present. We are confident this ailment can and will be overcome and she will be a joyful missionary in the Congo. Romans 8:28.⁸²

⁸¹ Missionary 34 AD 30

⁸² GC executive secretary to Missionary 34's parents, AD 5

A senior female missionary colleague conveyed her perspective on the case to the mission board. She identified as principal causes of the breakdown the missionary's conscientiousness and her eagerness to 'help,' both highly valued characteristics in Mennonite culture:

Our hearts have been heavy because of (the missionary's) illness, We thought she was very happy here and loved her work. The Africans loved her and she loved them. As you know she is a very conscientious girl, and so therefore not knowing the language, and not knowing these people was a great hindrance, and I would say the cause for her breakdown. Examples – on Sunday p.m.'s she would go to the girls compound, trying to get a few words, but she says 'they just don't get it and I don't get it.' She would go to the village trying to speak in words, but only to be defeated, 'How can I ever do mission work without the language.' It just depressed her not to be able to talk to these people. In class one day she told her class, if they would teach her Kipendi, she would teach them English. Result – she had not one class, but both classes at her veranda wanting to teach Kependi (sic) and learn English, Another – one poor boy came with a torn text book, Well she has one new book and gives it to him, well the whole class came and showed her their torn books and wanted a new one, poor girl she felt so bad that she couldn't give all of them new books, but she did the next best thing. Went to work, sewed, patched and rebound the books. These things some of us would regain ourselves, but it didn't for her. And these things bothered her. Her household – the girl was so busy they couldn't come to station social nite, (sic) and of course she followed by not coming either. And nothing would have done her more good, (and all of them) to take their mind off of their books. And the ladies being so busy made her feel bad, but it shouldn't, her being a new missionary. In all I believe, she would make good after her period of orientation and language study. Some can get along without, but they find it hard and she being weak wouldn't do it. Those were her main complaints, 'I don't know the language and I don't know the people.' I can't see and believe that the Lord would have us lose a good missionary as (her) and I believe she would make good and is able. Trusting this report has helped you a little, maybe a bit of teaching at home would help her.⁸³

⁸³ Missionary 35, AD 21

In spite of the missionary's own and everybody else's conviction that she had been called by God she did not succeed in negotiating the initial cultural re-location.⁸⁴

After our investigation into the initial re-location experiences of women with a personal sense of call, we now turn our attention to those without a personal sense of call. Missionary 4, who had had many years of experience, described women without a personal sense of call as being commonly dissatisfied with their mission situation:

The women who will admit that this is their husband's job – 'It's not my job, I'm here to look after the kids, and to support my husband,' usually are very unhappy doing what they are doing. And we⁸⁵ probably could think each of us of several examples of that.

This observation is largely born out by examples of women included in our case study. Missionary 21, who entered missions as a middle-aged woman, remembered following her husband's sense of call against some internal resistance:

They were looking for a pastor for this church (...), and as we talked to people we found out that they asked a lot of different people if they would go. But I think (my husband) was interested in it right away, because he had been on the mission board for years – he still was on the mission board just before we went. And he had travelled in Brazil one time with mission executives and he travelled twice in India with mission executives and I went back with him once to India.⁸⁶ So he was really interested in it, and we were about ready for a move anyway. He kind of stays ten years in each place he stays, it sort of seems. So he was quite interested in it. But I was not very anxious at all. It just seemed like such an overwhelming thing.

One of her major problems was leaving her grown up children behind:

I'd leave my kids. And I was trying to analyse why it was hard to leave the kids,' they were all married, and they were all settled and so on. And I think

⁸⁴ The general secretary at the time advised a prospective missionary on the basis of this event: 'Work hard now, also with your French, but when you get to the Congo be sure not to pressure yourself. Take it real easy the first six months. Study some local language but let your mind and body take time to adjust to that new world.' (To Missionary 27, AD 53)

⁸⁵ Her husband was present at this interview.

⁸⁶ She had grown up as an MK in India

partly it was I kind of had this feeling that I was abandoning them. And one of my friends said, 'Well maybe you felt abandoned.'⁸⁷ I don't think I realised maybe that was the cause of the sadness. But anyway, so we went.

She experienced her initial relocation phase as long and frustrating, mainly because of her lack of a personal mandate. This prevented her from finding a meaningful place for herself:

The thing is when you move your husband knows right away what he is going to be doing. And you don't. You have to figure out what you are going to do. And it took me quite a while to figure out where I fit into this. And the (local church) had a lot of very strong people in it because they were mission personnel and so on. Where do you fit into this? And some of them are quite capable Bible teachers and all the rest of it, and I didn't feel adequate in that area at all. So it took a while till I settled into what I really enjoyed.

The following is a similar account by Missionary 14, a woman who at over-forty years of age, but still with young children, had followed her husband's call even more reluctantly:

I drug my feet for a while, and finally I said, Well if that's where he wants to go that's where I will go too.

As had been the case with the previous interviewee, she too spoke of her initial inability to successfully make the transition into the foreign culture, describing it as 'difficult' and 'real difficult.'⁸⁸ She too could not find a personal place or mandate, and although eventually a task was assigned to her, her description of it did not give the impression that she had really embraced it:

It was difficult! We were in Belgium for nine months –, maybe a year, to learn French. And I did not have a special job when we went into (Zaire.) I wasn't a teacher, I wasn't a nurse, and I would have to do home schooling for (our son) And then they gave me the hostess job for the group of

⁸⁷ She had spent her school years at boarding school.

⁸⁸ It was not only those who did not have a personal sense of call who initially found the conditions difficult. Missionary 33 had felt called for example, but still experienced the first six month as 'difficult.' (AD 24)

missionaries that lived there, and I was in charge of doing things like that. But at first it was real difficult. (...) But I had work to do. There was lots of work to do. We had lots of visitors, and lots of guests. (Our mission station) was where the airplane came from Kinshasa with mail and passengers. And the 'MAF,' the 'Missionary Aviation Fellowship' had air-planes, and they would come with mail from all the different stations. And the mail that would come from the capital city – I was the one that went to the post office and picked up that mail, and we sorted all that mail and got it ready for all the different stations. And when the missionary plane came in, it was my job to take the mail sacks to them and bring the mail sacks that they brought from the other stations and sort them, all that mail that was a big job!

Her relocation difficulties were exacerbated by her inability to successfully acquire the local languages:⁸⁹

I did not get the French language. I had a tutor, and we went to the school that the missionaries had to go to. And (my husband) had a different one that really tutored him. And (my husband) knew German, so because he had a foreign language it was easier for him. It was very difficult, and I did not pass the exam. And then when we got to our station where we were going to be working the language was Chiluba. So we had to find a Chiluba teacher for us and that was worse than French! It was difficult for me. I never did get the language well enough that I could handle a devotional or anything like that.

This in turn contributed towards preventing her from successfully forming potentially supportive bonds with the local population:

⁸⁹ In contrast, another prospective missionary who had a strong sense of call, but was delayed in her departure for the mission field, wrote to the executive mission secretary, 'among other things I bought a fairly good recorder at Missionary Equipment. As (...) I have had no French teacher since Christmas, I decided to record the French records the C.I.M. office has and study French on my own.' (Missionary 27, AD 10). She wrote later from Brussels, where she conducted her initial language studies, she wrote: '(L)anguage study is not an easy task but I'm so glad that I'm finding it real interesting now. It is really quite a challenge.' (Missionary 27, AD 11)

*All the missionaries had house help, and yard people, and we didn't mesh very well. I didn't know the language well enough to tell a cook how to do what I wanted done, or how to prepare, and so I ended up doing my own house work and my own cooking and preparing the meals and laundry. I had a washing machine. The missionaries at first had fellows that did all their laundry by hand. And with the machine they didn't know how to handle a washing machine, and it was just easier for me to do everything by myself. And that was a mistake too, because had I not I would have been able to have somebody help me with the language, and then have a cook or laundry fellow that I could converse with. But I managed, I did what I could do!*⁹⁰

These stories indicate that those without a personal sense of call struggled significantly with their initial re-location phase.⁹¹ Either they took significantly longer to adjust than those with a sense of call or they failed to successfully adjust altogether, insofar as they struggled to find a place and a mandate for themselves in their new environment. In addition, they tended to be less motivated and/or unable to acquire the local language. In this way they cut themselves off from the vital support of the local population. This lack of integration, thereby separating themselves from a major potential support base, made them extra vulnerable to missionary attrition.

Up to this point we have discussed the role of the sense of call or the lack thereof in the initial re-location experience of those moving from North America to Africa. Evidence indicates that the sense of call to missions also played a major role in the reverse cultural relocation. Unexpectedly for some it became a strong liability on their return home. This was the case with Missionary 2. Her strong traditional sense of call to missions, which had played a very important, constructive role in her life as a missionary, turned into a burden on her

⁹⁰ Missionary 4 and her husband, who was present for part of the interview, identified learning of the local language as a pre-requisite for successful re-location and integration into the local population and eventually for a 'successful' ministry: Husband 'We have learned that the spouse who does not have the calling needs to get in and learn the language and begin to mingle with people and to associate with them. Or else we are going to lose them really fast.' Missionary 4: 'That would be the best way to get them in, because they are going to hold back from contact with people, so they need to be the ones right up front there, getting the language in, and then you might be able to save their work.'

⁹¹ These re-location difficulties were evident even during their furloughs, which for many early missionaries only occurred after four or five years of service. In a letter Missionary 29 described how during her furlough she needed to readjust to life in North America: 'It has been a time of getting acquainted again with everyday life in America, of renewing old friendships. (AD 16)

unplanned return home during the civil war in Congo. She felt that by leaving the mission field prematurely she had broken the sacred promise of mission as a life time vocation:⁹²

My sense of call was very important. But when we made the decision to come home that was I guess our stumbling block, because we felt we had a lifetime call, and a lifetime commitment, and to consider going home was like breaking that commitment. So it was a very painful decision to come home. I'm happy that we did, but I found it a very difficult choice.

In the case of Missionary 2 the trauma of her 'betrayal' of her sense of call had a permanent negative effect on her subsequent ability to make choices:

I felt the decision-making in my life was affected by that decision. I found decision making hard, of even small decisions. I would equivocate not knowing if I should do this or that and I often have pegged it to that big decision to leave Africa.

If only one partner felt called back home the dynamics were similar to those where only on marriage partner had felt called to the mission field. Again those, mostly women, who did not feel 'called home' found it particularly difficult to readjust and to find a niche and a mandate for themselves in their original home environment.

Missionary 11's strong traditional sense of call to mission, for example, also became a liability during her reverse re-location. She had succeeded in her initial cultural adjustments on the mission field partly on the basis of her sense of call.⁹³ She however struggled seriously to re-adjust on her return home, which she described as having been a 'rough' experience. This was largely due to two main factors. Firstly she returned home against her strong internal resistance in order to follow her husband who had been called to a home mission assignment, and secondly she had no 'place' to come home to:

⁹² Missionary 18 had a similar sense of betraying the call when after her family's evacuation from the Congo she was forced through her husband's illness to remain on furlough much longer than she had anticipated or felt comfortable with. She said in her interview: 'I don't know if this relates to you, but it was important for me. The ten years that we were home between 1960 and 1970, my husband wasn't too well, I had a feeling all that time. I had had this strong motivation to go as a missionary. And so I felt all the time somewhat guilty that we didn't go back. Because a lot of the missionaries did go back! And somehow or other it just didn't work out for us, and I kind of felt some resentment about it.'

⁹³ Cf. her statement in 'The Role of the Call in the Short Term Cultural Relocation' ...

The first year was rough. I had a rough adjustment the first year! Life was so different. I missed a lot of that life out there. The African life and my teaching role and my association with the African women, I missed that a lot. (...) When you come back to the United States you need something to get into, something to tie into and you need to feel useful, useful! And I didn't the first year!

Comparing the re-location challenges of 'going out' with those of 'returning' she remarked:

It is an adjustment both ways.

On her return home she experienced a loss of identity by moving from being 'a missionary in my own right' to just being 'my husband's wife:'

It was very busy for (my husband), he had his assignment. (...) He was involved immediately, and immersed completely as executive secretary. And then there was a lady in (the office) doing the book-keeping, they had a full time secretary. But I had a big adjustment, because I came from being a missionary in my own right to just being (my husband's) wife.

While the couple's calling to missions had been a shared one, their return home provided a defined role only for the husband. This initial forced individualisation within the marriage⁹⁴ proved to be 'very hard' for her:

It was very hard the first year, very hard! I didn't feel included! I didn't feel included! I was waiting for him to include me. He was so busy, was so involved.

She eventually found a place for herself through a personal assignment, which afforded her independence while simultaneously loosely including her in her husband's new position:

Eventually then I was offered to be the president of the women's auxiliary of 'Africa Inter Mennonite Mission.' And they had a big office building, and they had some extra rooms upstairs. So then I would go mornings and had an office, no one was using them anyway, and I became the director or

⁹⁴ Numerous interviewees described their joint missionary call as 'the glue' that either 'brought' or 'kept them together.' (Missionary 18; similarly Missionary 6, and Missionary 5.)

directrice of the women's auxiliary of 'Africa Inter Mennonite Mission.'

Finally I felt included then! I felt a part of it. (...) I was so glad about that little office on the first floor and they had big time accommodation and so forth upstairs, but I loved it! I had a manual typewriter, and I had a telephone, and I had a desk, and I enjoyed that. I had correspondence from the field. African women were writing to me, and missionary women were writing to me, and because I was the director of the women's auxiliary, I got to go to the board meetings every year. Finally I felt included! That was a wonderful thing for me to be included.

Her new assignment turned out to be an extension of her missionary call, which for her meant that she was able to use her mission experience, because she 'understood.'

Finally I also could have a lot of people in my home. We had a big house. I could help missionaries coming home from Africa. We met them at the airport and brought them into our home. I knew a lot about what it was like to come from Africa, and to come to the USA. I could also help people who had been recruited or were being sent out. They could come and stay at our house those last days before they actually left, do their last minute packing. They called it orientation when personnel would come back. They would bring them here to Elkhart at the home office for orientation. So I could help them. I could help them from the home end, because I understood, and I could help them when they were leaving to go out, because I understood.

Missionary 5 who had understood her missionary call primarily as a form of the call to discipleship, and who too returned home for the sake of her family spoke of a similar severe initial disorientation on her return:

I didn't want to come home but my husband (needed to come back). And someone was going to take over, and our oldest son was ready for university, and we had made a decision that we would come and live in the States with our children when they were ready for college. That we would not send them, because we heard enough stories of children who didn't adjust well when they came back. So we made the decision that whenever our children were ready for college, we would find jobs and live here. For me that was - it fit everybody except me! I was enjoying what I was doing. I was working in leadership training with women in the church, and it was

going good. And yet it was time for everybody else to go. So I had already started feeling depression. I would just cry and say, 'I just don't know what I'm going to do when I get home.'

Of her reverse cultural re-location experience on the whole she said:

It was a difficult time for me then, the adjustment back.

She reacted with depression to the major losses that her return home entailed,⁹⁵ which included the loss of Africa as home⁹⁶ and the important African support net went with it. It also included the drastic loss of the significance of her missionary skills, which she felt were suddenly of no importance in her home environment:

We were there thirteen years, and when I came back I went into depression. And it was only when people here helped me to see how much loss I was experiencing, everything from the wedding dishes which I hadn't brought back, loss of friendship, loss of community, a very close rural community, loss of valuable skills. Nobody here cares about whether you could speak several languages, or whether you can communicate with non-literate women. I mean who wants to know that here! So I had skills that were not needed here.

Eventually she was able to process some of these re-location issues, which were common issues of transition with a supportive group of women that specialised in this area:

⁹⁵ Missionary 13's remarks in a letter show how inherently stressful the loss of stability connected to a move was. This was also true for the children. She wrote in connection with their threatening evacuation during the Congo uprising: '(The children) have gone back to school. We just hope and pray they won't have to be uprooted from their studies. They feel the same way about it. When (our son) heard we might have to leave, he wrote, "I sure hope 'all over' we don't have to go to America." (AD 19). Missionary 41 wrote similarly on returning to Congo after a prolonged furlough: 'These last days of packing and preparation, moving out of our home have been the usual upheaval of family life. It is not easy to tear out roots laid down during four years here.' (AD 65)

⁹⁶ This letter excerpt, written by Missionary 25 while on a ship on its way to Congo, illustrates that the missionaries often felt like citizens of two worlds: 'While sailing along on the ocean away from one home and towards the other (...)' (AD 8). Missionary 40 wrote on furlough: 'I am homesick for my home in Africa.' (AD 58)

And then when we got here, the worst thing was everybody was saying 'Oh isn't it wonderful to be home again?' And I felt like wringing their necks and I would just come home crying. But that was during sort of the women's movement. And I found a group of women here working with the community mental health centre, and the county extension office, working in transitions for women. Whether it was being widowed, divorce, or moving, many women in transition. And it was outside the church, outside sort of my family that thought they now again owned me. And so that's where I found real sort of healing and recovery from that transition.

As had been the case with the previous interviewee, she too had to redefine her relationship with her family and particularly with her husband by gaining a greater degree of independence from him and finding her own post-mission identity:

I also grew in sort of self-identification from my husband. We had worked together well. We had been energised by learning language, everything we had done. But I also then felt I needed to differentiate myself from my husband. Because he now had this job at the college, and I was just staying home and keeping house. Well sort of doing what women here do, and have doughnuts when he brought his class home over, and make a nice supper whenever he wanted to have company and that just didn't feel very good. While he assumed that I would sort of be an extension of him, I remember telling him, 'Look, I'm not the one getting paid, you're the one that's getting paid. If you wanna have students over you can get your own doughnuts!'

Her loss of identity was exacerbated by the fact that during her prolonged absence while serving as a missionary she had lost her place in the home community. She had virtually become a stranger at home:

I didn't really have friends. By the time we left I had finished nurses' training, and then we'd gone off to graduate school, and then (into missions). So I didn't really have friends here. I had to start making friends.

This story of Missionary 5, who had lived out her call to discipleship on the mission field illustrates that although theoretically the call to discipleship and the call to counter cultural living equip the recipient of the call to be geographically mobile and to deal with cultural

relocation, in reality, the missionaries with such a sense of call, on account of their humanness, still struggled with their re-location experiences, and with the outsider-insider phenomenon.

Up to now we have established that those with a sense of call clearly succeeded far better in their initial cultural re-locating both from North America to Africa and on their return to North America. Those without a personal sense of call however, found it much more difficult to initially re-locate successfully. This indicates that a sense of call acted as a support factor in the initial cultural relocation process.

The Long View: The Call in Crisis – The Call Remodelled

The Woman's Burden

If we look at the long-term role of the sense of call we find that it was far more ambiguous than during the initial re-location phase. For one, although the majority of women witnessed to a personal sense of call, accounts of missionary attrition in the form of depression, 'nervous breakdowns,' and early termination of service, formed a prominent part of many stories. Such stories were either based on the women's personal experience or on their observation of others. The attrition accounts included observations such as the following two by Missionary 6, who at one point had acted as a missionary advisor:

In our mission at one point I think we had at least five (women) that were on some kind of medication for emotional disturbances. We had several people with emotional breakdowns.

Missionary 5, another senior missionary, and Missionary 17 commented respectively:

Scary how many women we had on anti-depressants. And: Usually our breakdowns were during the third and fourth year.

How are such attrition experiences to be explained in the light of the fact that most missionaries successfully negotiated their initial cultural re-location, many of them strongly supported by their sense of call? What additional burdens or stresses entered the picture in a long term service situation, and were they in any way related to their sense of call? We will investigate first the burdens they faced because they were women.

The Women's Burden

Multi-tasking was one clearly identifiable stress factor in the lives of married women. For many long term female missionaries the opportunity to practise and develop their

professional skills as a form of ministry turned out to be a two-edged sword. On the one hand it afforded them an important role in the missionary endeavour and, particularly in the case of early missionaries, opened up avenues for female ministry beyond the restricted scope they had at home. Missionary 18 remembered that one of her female ancestors preached on the mission field, which at that time was perceived as a strictly male prerogative at home:

My aunt was one of the first missionaries under the 'Congo Inland Mission' which became the 'AIMM.' She was a nurse. The mission was started in 1911 I think and she went out in 1912. Recently we have read some of the things her husband wrote – she married a Swedish missionary. They started the Swedish Baptist mission. But my great uncle's account was interesting. (...) He kept a diary, and he mentions (his wife) preaching and what a good preacher she was!

On the other hand, most married women included in the case study who had anticipated at the outset of their mission journey that their sense of call, be it of a traditional or of a more contemporary nature, would assume a high priority on the mission field, were soon faced with the burden of the classic role-juggling act of working wives. On the mission field they lived with the very real four-way tension of having to weigh the importance of their divine calling to be an active part of the mission endeavour, against their God-ordained roles of wife and mother, both of which were instinctively very close to their hearts. In addition they had their own personal needs.⁹⁷ About her missionary role Missionary 18 remembered:

At that time in our mission the women all had assignments. There was not anybody who went out as a missionary's wife.

The women's assignments were often but not always related to the professions in which they had been trained. Officially this professional work was viewed as a function of the missionary call. Practising their profession in Africa posed its very own challenges. Missionary 13 recounted some of the extraordinary and prolonged odds she faced as a novice missionary teacher, who had to teach a subject unfamiliar to her. This, after having had her first baby within six months of arrival on the mission field, while learning to live in 'the bush,' having to

⁹⁷ Cf. Dana Robert's observation that, '(t)he immensity of the expectations for missionary wives in the early period of American foreign missions meant that most women could select only a portion for their mission, but would feel the burden of inadequacy for the whole.' (American Women in Mission, p.3)

acquire the local language, struggling with the unfamiliar task of training household help,⁹⁸ and struggling with old fashioned household appliances:

(During the) first six months? I had a first baby! And we had a daily lesson in Kipendi, which was a tribal language. This was really the interior, what they call the bush. And (...) then not only that, but they thought I ought to have been more useful so I also taught a class in arithmetic. They were forming a new class of kids that didn't quite make it, and they needed some help. I had never studied calcule mentale, so that was a new one on me!⁹⁹ (...) I brought the baby in a buggy right into class, and taught the class, and took the baby back home. We did all kinds of things in those days! Try to handle two or three things, plus house help, which wasn't the easiest thing in the world either! To try and train your helpers to start that cook stove. All cooking was done on a wood stove. And all our washing was done on a rubbing board. That's how we went there through the first four, five years.

Such constant task overload was usually also a part of their furlough experience. Missionary 35 described in a letter how much she had been in demand while at home:

Apparently sitting quietly for too long a period of time is not easy – at least not in the home community. Just a sample – “Will you bring a missionary message on Sunday morning?” “We would like to have you tell of your experiences at Sunday School.” “Have you any slides?” “Could you speak to our Bible School?” “Can you come for Coffee?”¹⁰⁰

Missionary 18 recounted some of her furlough challenges as follows:

When we got home, all of us came down with colds, and (my husband) left the following day, so I had my hands full, especially with (my baby), who has just gotten some more teeth. Then of course there is always, cooking,

⁹⁸ Missionary 35 wrote to her mission board a description of the strange foods that she had been introduced to in Africa: deer meat, mango sauce, planton chips, wild pig and cooked rice cereal. (AD 32)

⁹⁹ She was not the only one who indicated that she felt inadequately prepared for some of her duties. Missionary 35 wrote in her furlough report: ‘I didn’t really feel qualified to teach music as extensively as I did.’ (AD 35)

¹⁰⁰ AD 36

*etc., and I have been trying to get our clothes ready for winter. After not having to concern myself with winter clothes for four years this seems quite a project.*¹⁰¹

In addition the missionaries usually lived very unsettled lives during their furlough, deputising and visiting their friends and families. Missionary 41, who had finally settled into her home, wrote gratefully 'It is so nice to have our own place.'¹⁰²

The stress of multi-tasking experienced by professional married women was sometimes exacerbated by marriage dynamics. The women often felt forced to compromise, and to readjust their initial mission expectations. Firstly, many of them were faced with the fact that in practice it was predominantly the husband's assignment that assumed priority while the wife was expected to somehow 'fit in.' There were some couples, however, who negotiated among themselves the priority of their respective assignments, and occasionally it was the women's vocation that took precedence over that of her husband. This was the case with Missionary 18 who remembered:

The decision where we were sent was dependent on me rather than on him.

She remembered further,

our first term there was a bit of – not friction between us, but he really wasn't completely happy in the work he was doing.

Predominantly though, the missionary postings were male orientated and many interviewees automatically described their husband's task as the dominant one. Even though elsewhere in the interview they might indicate that they too had built up significant ministries, they often listed the spouse's assignments first and gave them considerably more definition than they did to their own roles. Missionary 5 illustrated this tendency:

(My husband) was director at first until another person took over as director, and so the director's wife is seen like the pastor's wife.

Missionary 19 indicated that the prioritising of her husband's assignment meant that she and the children were left on their own for long stretches of time:

¹⁰¹ AD 28

¹⁰² AD 62

My husband was assigned to the village schools and village evangelism, and had to follow the governmental rules to be in the villages or in the schools 220 days a year. (...) I worked in mission accounting with one of the ladies.

These examples indicate the women accepted the priority of the husband's call more or less willingly, often viewing their function as a contribution to the couple's common calling.¹⁰³

With regards to their deployment the position of single women was somewhat different. On the one hand Missionary 20 said:

One thing that is different is that sometimes with couples there is a conflict if there is one mission post that would be good for one of them, but another mission post would really be better for the other one. They have to decide then. For a single person that doesn't become a problem. You know you go where you are best suited!

On the other hand, it was usually simply assumed that single missionaries were more flexible than married ones. They were therefore often re-deployed less thoughtfully. One such single missionary, who had probably been more hastily deployed to a new challenging posting than if she had been married, wrote the following about her new position in a letter to the Secretary of the GC Mission Board:

If I had known longer before I'm afraid, I might not have come, because it is a large job, but as I said then, He never gives us to do things without giving us the wisdom and strength to do them.¹⁰⁴

Another single missionary wrote to her friends at home:

A few months ago I was asked to stay on another year before returning to the States, and I am considering this seriously. It was said then that a nurse was coming to Kalonda, and it would help if I stayed to tie things over (...) then our

¹⁰³ The women in both examples described elsewhere with great enthusiasm their own effective ministries.

¹⁰⁴ Missionary 32, AD 23

*Executive Committee met and decided, among other things, that this couple was to go to Mutema instead. So it goes!*¹⁰⁵

The married mother however, had to consider her husband and children beside her profession. Based on the traditional marriages that most couples led it was usually left to the wife to juggle the missionary and the family duties. This normally did not happen without severe feelings of guilt. Missionary 15 hinted indirectly, at her retrospective discomfort at having prioritised her children while they were young over and above her missionary involvement:

Missionary 15: I felt for the first few years that my job was with the children.

M.S.: Was that alright for you?

Missionary 15: For the first few years yeah. (...). Probably I had more questions about it since that time than I did then (...) because I think I felt that my job was with the children.

Missionary 14 harboured guilt feelings towards her children who sometimes came second to her very challenging missionary role:

My husband and I were in teaching, and so we both were interested in the teaching part of it. And starting new schools. (...) I don't know that we were qualified, but there was such a need for it so we just did what we could. It was very challenging, really very challenging, almost so much that you wondered if you could do it! 'Cause I had family too! I had three children. They were all born there. And they had their needs too. I suppose many times we neglected them so we could fulfil the needs that were about us.

The following letter excerpt addressed to 'Dear Mission Friends' is a classic case study of a woman being torn between her missionary duties and her sick child. In this particular instance the mission conference, which she clearly enjoyed, took priority after she had sought guidance in prayer:

'But husband, should I really go out this week-end when our son has such a fever?' This was Friday morning, February 13. We prayed and sought the Lord's guidance, and found peace to go ahead for all the plans had been made to have our first Women's Conference in our district. (...) What a joy

¹⁰⁵ Missionary 30, AD 18

after the service not to have to rush off, but rather to stay in the village for two whole days.

(...)

P.S. You guessed it, when we got home our son was better and was playing Bible Dominoes on the floor with Daddy.¹⁰⁶

Although Missionary 18 did not remember suffering from permanent work-related stress herself, she did remember that her daughter did not always cope well with her mother's medical obligations:

When my kids were little most of the time I didn't really feel that I was overworked. I mean there were always times when you were. And I know particularly it was hard on our daughter, because it always seemed like I was called away at meal times, particularly suppertime. I don't know why! She used to scream and scream, and scream.

A further stress factor for the married women was that, as mentioned before, many husbands were often absent from home and left the wives with the responsibility of running much of the family's home life. In this regard the mission situation was characterised by some unique features. On the one hand the traditional duties of wife and mother were made easier due to the fact that most women had local household help and childminders. On the other hand mission reality often required the women to fend for themselves and their children under stressful circumstances, and this in turn made them extra vulnerable to feelings of loneliness. Missionary 19 whose husband had to spend 220 days a year in the villages remembered feeling homesick because,

he was away a lot! And I had the children at home. Our little girl was four, and our second child was just a year old.

Missionary 41's medical doctor husband, who had been overwhelmed with hospital duties immediately after the family's arrival in the Congo wrote:

(My wife) has had to do most of the getting settled into the new home here and has done an excellent job of making us all comfortable.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Missionary 43 and family, AD 44

¹⁰⁷ AD 61

While married women struggled to cope with life on the mission field with their husbands absent part of the time, single women had to face the missionary challenges without a steady male partner altogether. Missionary 6 observed how difficult this was for them at times, especially if they were posted in isolated places during such occasions as their 'village live-ins':

We had a number of single women that came. They really struggled! Really difficult for single women! I think of the six or seven that we related to in our team, I would say only one had a really positive experience. Several of them had to leave early. I guess with a couple you have that partner to share with, and that support. And I don't think we had the right kind of structure for singles. We had one single man, and he has also had problems. I think maybe the Catholics have something with putting together singles in their convents, where they have that support from somebody else.

These demands on the women to cope without their husbands were difficult in themselves but they could be greatly exacerbated by health problems, for example. The medical records stored in the archives as well as letters and interviews indicate that many women suffered from sometimes severe medical ailments¹⁰⁸ and the additional stress caused by such problems. The following letter excerpt illustrates such an instance of illness amidst great demands from all sides. It was written by Missionary 2 at the return of her family to the Congo, and addressed to the secretary in the home office:

We hardly had time to get unpacked and somewhat settled when I got sick. I ran a fever and had very severe pain in both legs and one became paralyzed. I thought at the time it might be polio + so did the doctor but nothing was said. We thought the paralysis would leave when the baby was born but it didn't and I was very weak. I fell quite often and couldn't trust myself to carry the baby. My back and chest didn't seem to have any strength. Then I developed a breast abscess that kept my strength at low ebb. Finally after 2 weeks and 14 injections of penicillin it subsided. Those were trying days. Everything in the garden needed to be canned just at that time, our freight arrived within the same 24 hours as (our baby daughter) and the other children were all a bit insecure with coming back to Congo

¹⁰⁸ Missionary 33 for example had contracted 'Congo parasites' (AD 26), others suffered from Malaria, and other ailments.

and boiled water, mosquito nets, strange language, etc.¹⁰⁹ Thank the Lord for wonderful fellow missionaries who came to our aid with much love and prayers. Now I am gradually getting back to normal. The only muscle really affected is in my right thigh. I am beginning to manage steps (stairs) now. And now everyone agrees it must have been polio. I was exposed to it on the boat because one of the children of missionaries with whom we travelled came down with it just a week before I did.

In addition to their own health issues, the usual family health worries of western society were amplified on the mission field, particularly for women with babies and small children. Missionary 18 emotionally remembered during her interview the blessing of being able to breast-feed her own baby while bottle fed babies succumbed to various medical problems on the ship that evacuated them during the Congo uprising:

In England we got on a ship, came home in a ship, and that was very, very cold! But I know I was very happy that I was still nursing our youngest son, because some of the babies that were being bottle fed were having all kinds of problems, diarrhoea and so on. And you didn't always get your meal on time, and he was already ten months old, so he wasn't really surviving on my milk, but at least it tided him over when he was hungry!

Not every child was able to receive the medical treatment it required on the mission field. This occasionally led to the premature termination of a family's service, which usually did not happen without deep soul-searching by the family and the mission organisation alike. Missionary 16's story reflects some of the trauma involved for the parents in such cases:

We moved to our village (...) at the end of December. And then (my daughter) got the dysentery in May, never fully recovered after that. She lost a lot of weight. We kept going back to the capital and she still had bacteria in her stools, and tummy aches and food just upset her. We considered coming back to the States several times. We didn't actually

¹⁰⁹ Representatives of the mission board felt that her illness was a result of an overload of demands, although they seemed to play down her suffering: 'We wanted to say that we admire you for carrying the load of a family plus pregnancy, plus learning another language. We suspect that all of this together accounts largely for the fact that you did not feel quite so chipper after the arrival of this last baby. However, we hope by now you are feeling much better and know the words 'As thy day so shall thy strength be' are for you.' (AD 49)

come until she started going downhill really fast in January. So we were there for a year and a half, but she said, 'Mum, most of my time in our village I was sick,' which is true! (...) And yet she loved it there! Part of the reason why we waited so long was 'cause she did not want to come back. (...)

And then also communicating back here (to Missions Head Quarters), was hard as far as the decision to come back. 'Cause in July I just wanted to come back, and they felt we should stay. And then at one point they agreed we could come back, but then the board met and decided we should go (for medical help in another African country) instead. So just that communication from long distance, what's the best decision to make?

In the case of Missionary 17, her youngest child who was mentally challenged proved to be unable to cope with the boarding school situation, and eventually was the reason why the parents prematurely terminated their missionary service:

She wasn't able to cope really. I remember how I begged the board that they would give us a job in Kinshasa in the capital city, and that she would go to school where we lived! And they said no, and we went back anyway, and then within a year or a year and a half we had to come home because of her anyway. So I knew! I knew she couldn't do it! She could not do it! – Psychologically! Some children could, but she couldn't! And then she knew that 'I'm making my whole family change their life forever, and go back to Canada first, and then to the United States, and it's because of me!' That marks you too!

One of the most painful issues the women raised concerning this conflict between the divine call to missions and the call to motherhood, proved to be the practice of sending the children to boarding school. In this regard Mennonite missionaries were no different from missionaries of other denominations. As had been the case in early Anabaptist history, their sense of call took precedence over family obligations. The very young children were usually home schooled by their mothers and other female missionaries, after which time they were sent to boarding school at around the age of nine or ten. Most missionaries seemed to, at least outwardly, have accepted this arrangement as an unavoidable act of obedience that formed an integral part of their missionary call. Echoing the deep respect with which they had been taught to view the divine caller God the caller in their childhood. The divine claim

on their lives had priority over their children's claims. This is evident from the following quote by Missionary 2:

We believed honestly, that this is what God was asking us to do, and we did it!

It was also what the policy of the mission organisation. Missionary 10, a former MK and at one stage a missionary herself, painfully remembered:

That was the thing that was done then, that was apparently what the mission expected.

The following are some emotions Missionary 2, missionary 17 and Missionary 11 experienced as they sent their children away:

O that's like cutting your heart out! It was very hard.

It's like a mother-bird that pushes the little bird out of the nest and says fly baby, fly!

The hardest thing I think of all, of being that young missionary woman, was sending my young children away to boarding school. It wasn't giving up luxuries, it wasn't the wood stove or the kerosene lamp, or the toilet that didn't flush, it wasn't that at all! It was, having to send my young children away, one thousand miles away to the boarding school in the capital. (...) I wanted to take care of them myself! And I know that many nights they went to bed with tears in their pillows. And there were times when they really needed us but we couldn't be there and I missed seeing them and being with them! I think that was – of all the adjustments, and of all the things we did that was the hardest – giving up my young children at age nine and ten, and sending them away to boarding school.¹¹⁰

In retrospect Missionary 17 voiced lasting doubts about the correctness of her decision,

¹¹⁰ This was one difficulty missionaries also shared with their home constituencies. One mother shared in a letter: 'I think this is one of the hardest things in a missionary life – seeing the children growing up and being away from them so much. (Missionary 31, AD 22)

And now in retrospect, I wonder some(times) - I wonder! I shouldn't say sometimes!

A similar mechanism to that of boarding school came into play when it came to the children's tertiary education, which was generally not available in their environment at the time. This resulted in the parents sending them to North America for their studies. Again this practice was partly aimed at facilitating the children's eventual reintegration into North American society. This additional stage of separation from their children, which was even greater in distance and time caused the mothers further deep anxiety. Missionary 19 explained:

I think the most difficult was to leave our daughter here in the States after she finished high school. It was in the early seventies, and in the late sixties when she stayed. And this was just in the time when drugs were becoming strong. So that was very difficult, very emotional!¹¹¹

Sending their children to boarding school and to the US for their tertiary education was not only an act of obedience but it partly also reflected the women's thinking on the two worlds, the North American and the African culture, both of which they were now citizens of. They tended to draw the line at integration with the local population when it came to their children's education. It was important for them to keep open their potential for re-integration into North America. Missionary 8 stated:

Because we wanted (the children) in the end to be able to live in both cultures, to be able to be at home in Congo, but also when we would come back here (US), when they would be adults, that they would not be so strange here. And I felt that that was important!

In some cases the entire family seemed to quite naturally fall in with this arrangement as the following statement by Missionary 4 indicates:

One of the options would have been to home school. But even the kids didn't see that as a very good possibility. They said that when they were home, they wanted to do what the villagers were doing. They didn't want to

¹¹¹ Missionary 19 and her husband wrote the following to a representative of the CIM mission board about the family's deferred return to Congo: 'Our delay in returning to Congo is alleviating some slight problems with (our daughter), and the fact that she would be staying behind. (17 is a very early age to be left entirely without parental guidance these days.) (AD 43)

stay in the courtyard and do schoolwork. And so they went to school. And then when they came home from school, they were just a part of village life. And even the early boarding school experiences were very positive too. We had very good dorm parents, and our kids were very close to them. They were young, so they really bonded very closely with the dorm parents as well.

It was not only the mothers themselves who suffered because of the separation. Many of them had to witness the traumatic effect it had on their children, often far into their adulthood. Missionary 17 emotionally shared the following:

(Our son) was an adult before he told me that he cried himself to sleep every night! (...) He wanted to protect us! He never told us that till he was grown up. Never! And I still remember hearing that for the first time and realising what we had put him through. - No that's the one thing, the only thing that we felt was very hard, us not being able to have the children with us! (...) And there were missionaries who sent their children away from home earlier than we did! Our children were fourth graders when they went the first time.

As time progressed, the issue of MKs was increasingly addressed by the mission agencies. Missionary 41 wrote that a Missionary Health Workshop that she had attended during furlough was entirely concerned with,

the missionary child, his problems, how missionary parents sometimes are the cause of the problems without realizing this, their guilt feelings.¹¹²

The boarding school issue further illustrates that while the women's anticipatory statements on their sense of call and on their mandate were usually clear-cut and assured retrospectively this was often not the case. A few of the above statements indicate that in retrospect significant doubt had arisen in them about their original position and their view of the divine caller and of their mandate.

Those with a fundamentalist-revivalist background tended to carry additional burdens, which we have already flagged elsewhere, and which will now be discussed in some more detail.

¹¹² AD 64

The Fundamentalist-Revivalist Burden

The Women's burden is clearly dominant and this is evident from the interviews and other documents. However, there are two related burdens - the fundamentalist-revivalist burden and the Mennonite burden, that could pose a problem for the missionaries. These will be discussed next.

Two classic aspects of their missionary call that have the potential to turn into a fundamentalist-revivalist burden are summarised on the prayer card of Missionary 23 and her family. Ending with 'OUR BURDEN' the card reads,

CHRIST'S COMMAND, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

THEIR NEED "But if the Gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost"

OUR BURDEN "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel."¹¹³

At another point her family's prayer card was headed 'Answering Congo's Call.'¹¹⁴ The fundamentalist-revivalist call was geared towards preaching the Gospel to every soul so that they should be saved. This was not only God's command but it was also the need of the people. The realities of the mission field were that not every soul who heard the Good News responded to it positively. Many missionaries struggled at times with the lack of apparent success of their labours, particularly in the spiritual sphere. This is illustrated by Missionary 29's furlough assessment of her professional work as a teacher and 'directrice.' Although she put on a brave face her frustrations with the lack of evidence of scholastic and spiritual progress in some of her young charges, and in older villagers, shine through:

Q: What has been the general nature of your work during this term of service? How well do you feel you have succeeded in what you have tried to do? What has been your greatest joy? What have been your greatest disappointments?

A: *Since the beginning of 1954 I have been director of the Ecole Preparatoire (6th +7th grades) and in the past two school years have taught all French classes in the school. As director I was also responsible for the housing and food for these boys. (...)I have often allowed things to trouble me and by my impatience have failed to glorify the Lord, But He has been faithful and whatever there is of success, the glory is His.*

¹¹³ AD 3

¹¹⁴ AD 4

It is my joy to see these young people grow in their Christian experience and win spiritual victories. On the other hand, there were some who have not been willing to yield themselves to the Lord and because of misdemeanor had to be dismissed. Others do not show the interest in spiritual things that we would like to see. I also find great joy in doing village visitation but have not had as much time for it as I would like to have, I am disappointed in that there are not more who are willing to consecrate themselves to the Lord and be more separated from the customs of the village.¹¹⁵

In keeping with this understanding of the missionary mandate, which focuses relatively strongly on evidence of the missionary effort, Missionary 31 indicated her satisfaction with the success of her husband's ministry in a letter to her home constituency:

(My husband) has been making his regular literature trips, bouncing merrily along over these roads. Ten days ago on a supply trip west of here he and (a colleague) sold over 700 copies of the new issues of Tuyaya Kunyi magazine at a native market in less than two hours. Their supply became exhausted before they got home; they radioed the press for an extra printing of this issue for sellers who hadn't yet been supplied. The magazine has about 25,000 readers now; pray God will really use it to plant the seed of the Gospel in the hearts of the masses.¹¹⁶

In addition to the burdens discussed above, every Mennonite missionary tended to, either directly or indirectly, carry some Mennonite burdens.

The Mennonite Burden

The Mennonite burden manifested itself indirectly through the women's early socio-religious formation and also more directly through certain distinctives of their mission praxis.

Missionary 5 made a direct link between missionary burn out and the fact that in a socio-religious environment where discipleship is emphasised, especially in the case of women, there tends to be an imbalance between giving and receiving, and also a striving for perfection:

¹¹⁵ AD 74

¹¹⁶ AD 20

I think a lot of that is how we were acculturated here in North America. And that has to do I think both with the religious life and with our culture, that a great deal of emphasis is put on women for servitude, discipleship, humility, submission, perfection. And that combination, I think, tends to emphasise the giving part rather than the receiving part of our faith. And it doesn't encourage self-care.

The desire to give and to help had played a key part in the development of some women's sense of call, and it kept resurfacing on the mission field in women who felt challenged to address the needs of others, sometimes beyond their strength, as Missionary 13 testified:

There was such a need for (teaching) so we just did what we could. It was very challenging, really very challenging, almost so much that you wondered if you could do it!

The fact that Mennonite mission praxis, particularly in its more recent manifestation, focussed heavily on discipleship by serving the local community through integration and identification entailed its own challenges. As with other ideals, this too exacted a high price from the missionaries and often proved to be impossible to translate into reality. Missionary 6 described some of the ways in which she felt Mennonites were doing missions 'differently:'

I would say that as Mennonites we did have a different way of approaching mission work. The people on our team that did the actual Bible teaching they did learn the Setswana. That was very important. And to try to work within the cultural setting and identify with the people. One of the ways in Botswana that new workers were introduced was through village live-in. And we all spent varying amounts of time in the village. People that needed to learn Setswana very well spent longer periods of time in the village live-in, and then of course taking some language training.

She proceeded to describe the actual effect this understanding of the mandate had on many missionaries. In the cases of some the strong focus on practised servanthood contributed to the premature termination of the service, because it asked too much of the human individual:

O we did some foolish things (because of) our style! I mean we put a single woman in (a certain place) and one at (another place). And in both cases we felt that there were enough other support people around, but it just didn't

work. Yeah, emotional break downs! And some of the married women had emotional troubles too. But because of a strong partner they were able to pull through it, and hang in there.

To conclude this section on burdens: Clearly in the long term the women were faced with many challenges and which caused them serious emotional strain. As a result many suffered from emotional disorders which ranged from mild to serious, with some even having to terminate their service prematurely. The following section describes and analyses a few individual examples of women who experienced emotional shipwreck, their subsequent recovery and the remodelling of their sense of call. This is done with a special focus on Anabaptist/Mennonite factors potentially related to these events, by asking the question if the women's Anabaptist/Mennonite roots, especially the understanding of the divine call as the call to discipleship and to counter-cultural living, contributed in any way to their attrition.

The Call Remodelled

The crisis of the call is usually related to aspects of the women's concepts of their sense of call that did not stand the test of real life in mission. In their application statements many especially early missionaries had stated heroically their conviction that God would give them the strength for mission-related suffering, and that therefore it was not to be feared. Many women had also grown up with an almost idealised view of Mennonites who had suffered for their faith. Missionary 16 had grown up with the notion that a believer needed to be broken, and that therefore it was desirable to be broken:

When I was younger, I was almost wanting brokenness. 'And I want to be broken, I want to be broken!'

However, she was not prepared for the reality of the suffering that she encountered in the mission situation:

(I had) some real hard experiences (on the mission field). And I have not welcomed that kind of brokenness. It's been very painful. And looking back I see that could have been welcomed as part of God's work. (...) And now I said, 'I don't want this! This is too hard! I didn't expect anything this hard!' So I guess I do (accept suffering as part of God's work in my life), but – I could say in the past three years that I haven't welcomed it. Like it hasn't been fun (...), but when you know it's God's work you can.

At the time of the interview she still struggled to try and readjust her romanticised view of human suffering, and of God's role in it. After the family's premature return from the mission field she remained in a state of confusion. She had retained her view that it was possible to view suffering in a different light if one accepted it as part of God's overall work in one's life, but her former clear-cut conviction on this issue was giving way to a much quieter, more realistic, persuasion. Her experience had led her to the conclusion that it was not easy to understand God's plan or to positively integrate her missionary suffering into her faith life. In this regard her daughter's post-mission sentiments seemed to echo her own:

(She was) feeling like we were spit up, chewed up, and thrown out.

Missionary 17 too had to adjust important aspects of her sense of call, including her original view of herself, of God and of her calling. This came about through traumatic mission-related experiences. Her story illustrates how the tendency to reduce certain aspects of Anabaptist/Mennonite faith to static behavioural patterns such as a 'can do' and 'will do,' and 'have to do' attitude,¹¹⁷ without a strong supernatural dimension, posed a danger to the missionary calling. In her case her self-reliance and competency, which had been encouraged in her early religio-cultural environment, had engendered in her a certain sense of pride that over time seriously put her calling in jeopardy. She prefaced her story by commenting on how unexpectedly easily she initially coped with many of the commonly feared missionary challenges:

I had liked it! I liked it there! Our journey to Africa turned out to be much easier than I thought it would be – which was a surprise, but it was much easier! Culture-wise, language-wise, friends with other missionaries-wise, senior missionaries-wise, relationship-wise with the Africans.

Yet in spite of that fact that her initial re-location experience turned out to be 'better than (she) had expected,' she admitted that,

yet it was so difficult!

The primary sources of her stress had both major external and internal origins. Firstly, even though she coped well externally with individual adjustments to missionary life, it was the accumulation of the demands, particularly as a young working wife and mother, that proved

¹¹⁷ Missionary 30 had to learn on an extended furlough to 'take time to enjoy myself and not feel guilty.' She added: 'I think there are others who need to learn this' (AD 17)

too much in the end. A second exacerbating factor was the duration of the stress. Her initial period of service lasted for an uninterrupted period of five years. This for her and for others like her proved to be:

Too long and too hard.

Thirdly, against the backdrop of this multiplicity of ongoing demands she put in charge of the primary school girls at the mission school, which was known to be a notoriously difficult assignment:

After I had been (on the mission field) a year, our baby was three months old, one of the missionaries that was in charge of the girls left on furlough – the girls lived in dormitory-style housing and went to primary school on the mission station. I was assigned to that job by the other missionaries. And it was always considered to be one of the hardest jobs on the mission station. It was considered to be so difficult! And I was so young, and I had a baby! And it was the hardest thing I ever did in my life, but it was also the best!

She dealt with these heavy external demands with an internal response, which was largely based on her optimistic view of her personal abilities and strength,¹¹⁸ characterised by a strong sense of determination, competitiveness, and as she herself admits, of pride:

I in my own heart decided 'This is not too hard' – I had a lot of pride, 'this is not too hard for me! I know that the single ladies have a lot more to give to this than I do as a married woman with a husband and two children. But I can do it, and I can do it even as good as they can – or better! And I'm going to!' That's the kind of determination – it's not very godly, but that's the kind of determination I had!

This 'can do' attitude as response to the challenges of her missionary call was very likely influenced by some virtues of her childhood, which in her personal case had included,

hard work, obedience, pulling your fair share of whatever.

¹¹⁸ According to the application forms many early missionaries had a strong sense of unworthiness as far as their calling. Over time this changed, with the modern approach explicitly selecting missionaries on the basis of their strengths, *i.e.* of their giftedness.

She had further been taught by her father the proud - and at the same time - shame-orientated, self-sufficiency, which refuses to admit weakness or ask for assistance. She was the one who had been told during the great depression that,

Mennonites don't go on relief!

Eventually, after the birth of her second child, she collapsed emotionally under the burden of her heroic battle with her sense of calling:

After I had my second baby I had a nervous break down – I mean not a real one but a bordered on one as you could get.

She experienced classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress.¹¹⁹

(I) couldn't sleep, was afraid of everything. So they sent us to the lake, where we had three cottages. (...) And I wouldn't let the children go swimming, which is so far away from my character you have no idea! I was scared the snakes would get them! I had never been scared before. But I was afraid of everything! And I couldn't sleep. And my mind did not stop working! And you know what I noticed? You can think on two different levels. You can be doing the normal thing that you are supposed to be doing, just on automatic pilot, and this thing is just going, going, going, going. It never stops! So I could have really had a terrible break down! But I was fortunate, I didn't.

Her condition was treated according to mission practices at the time by lay people such as a missionary nurse, and with the help of her husband:

In her case the critical turn around was initiated as her husband and the missionary, with whom she had secretly been competing, intervened to relieve her of her assignment in which she had been determined to succeed, although, it clearly exceeded her resources:

And then this missionary lady that I had thought that I could do it better than she could, was back from her furlough, and I had had the girls already for two, three years. And it was sink or swim – learn the language or die, and also learn the culture or die. And I was very determined, and then my husband went to this missionary lady and (...) She looked at him, and she

¹¹⁹ These include anxiety caused by the exposure to severe stress. (*The Merck Manual of Medical Information, Pocket Books*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, 2003 p.556)

said bring me the keys! Just like that, bring me the keys. So he came home, and she knew that work backwards and forwards, she'd done it for years. And so he came, and got the keys, and she took over from there, and I could be at home, and we could make it our five years.

According to her the critical factor in her temporary missionary shipwreck lay not only in the external factors she was faced with, but importantly also with the internal coping mechanisms with which she had faced them. In hindsight she discerned this coping mechanism as having been

not very godly.

She had misunderstood the divine call through her own need to succeed:

This determination of mine, that I was gonna be able to do the girl's work no matter what - I did that to myself.

Her experience ties in with Missionary 5's observation:

I think our self-esteem can be really tied into being asked to do something, or offering to do something. And then calling is the sacrifice, the cross that Christ has given me to bear and stuff! So it's all tied together I think in how we perceive the gospel, how we perceive our call, how we perceive the needs out in the world, how we perceive our own self-image and care kind of thing!

The actual turn around and healing process of this super efficient missionary depended on her gaining critical new insights into herself, her missionary motivation, and into the God who had called her. In doing so she had to drop counterproductive aspects of her personality, which had been supported by Mennonite faith and practice. In addition she had to drop her super-heroine status, so evident in many older application forms, and in the long-held perception of many home constituencies.¹²⁰ These unrealistic and therefore destructive

¹²⁰ Although the missionaries often did not feel free to share very deeply with their home constituencies while they were on the mission field, whatever home support they received was important to them. This is evident from the following letter excerpt: 'The reports we have read of the Mission Candidate school at the Mission home in Chicago have been most encouraging. We were particularly touched that you had special prayer for those of us who are expecting little ones.' (Missionary 18, AD 27). Missionary 29 mentioned in her Christmas letter: 'I want to take this

components of her interpretation of the call had to be dismantled, *i.a.* through, what in classic theology would be called, confession and repentance:

And I know also when I went and begged forgiveness from the single missionary woman and told her how much I admired her for when she just said to (my husband), 'Bring the keys;' how she had saved my missionary career.

Her calling was further revived by a similar cycle of events during her subsequent first furlough, which she eventually embarked on while still emotionally vulnerable.

Initially she again acted according to the shame-orientated behavioural pattern she had learnt as a child and had displayed on the mission field before, this time trying to avoid loss of face before her home constituency. And again this cover-up behaviour prevented her from receiving much needed support. In this instance too it was the spiritual insight of a mature friend that broke this destructive cycle:

One day in church a friend of mine said, 'I'm praying very hard that the Lord is gonna give you the joy to go back to the Congo!' And I said, 'Does it show?' She said, 'No it doesn't show!' I said, 'How do you know?' She said, 'The Holy Spirit told me!' (...) And I thought I was putting on a wonderful front. But inside I just cringed!

Similar to the boarding school episode, her disclosure of her inability to cope and her confession to a friend proved to be the beginning of another significant turnaround in her missionary calling:

I'll never forget it! And it wasn't too long after that that I did begin to feel that it would be OK to go back.

Her move from super-achiever to a flawed missionary in need of love and grace is echoed by a parallel development in her concept of God. Over time it changed from that of God, the distant and rather stern observer to that of a loving protector, as represented by Jesus:

M.S.: Do you remember what God was like for you as a little girl:

opportunity to thank every one of you from the depths of my heart for your greetings, gifts and prayers.' (AD 15).

Missionary 17: God was very holy. (...) God was austere, but very, very holy. And you addressed him in a special language. He was not to be trifled with.

M.S.: Is that still how you imagine him today?

Missionary 17: No, no! No, as a mother hen, sitting on her little chicks, protecting them, that's how he has become for me.

M.S.: When did the change occur?

Missionary 17: I don't know gradually I think - a whole different picture! Although I still believe he is very holy but I see him so different. If Jesus is a picture of God, that changes everything from what my first idea of God was!

In this aspect too, her retrospective oral witness, based on her actual mission experience introduced a more realistic view to the triumphalist convictions that are also found in some of the archival material, and that she had initially held herself, namely that through Christ one can do all things and overcome all obstacles.¹²¹ It is not so much that in hindsight the interviewee would deny the basic truth of such beliefs. Rather she had become aware that her 'hardest experience' also turned out to be her 'best,' because it cause her to undergo a major paradigm shift. Firstly she had to shed the partly Mennonite burden of a false, *i.e.*, unrealistically optimistic view of her own capability and strength. Secondly, she had to over time shed the Mennonite burden of the distant, demanding divine caller and get to know his compassionate, protective side through Christ. In Mennonite specific Christological terms we may say that she integrated into her ontological Christology the human Christ.

Missionary 18's story contains some striking similarities to the previous one. The recurring element being that the missionary calling was for a prolonged period of time meshed with a strong internal drive to compete and to succeed. Earlier on in the interview she had explained that her own sense of call was connected with that of her mother, who

*had been very anxious to have her children be missionaries or at least (...) (she) kind of directed (them) to the ministry, some kind of Christian ministry, and also some kind of helping profession.*¹²²

Missionary 18's powerful drive, which was probably at least partly due to her early conditioning, surfaced strongly for the first time when she and her family were unable to return to Africa after their evacuation on account of the political unrest in the Congo. One of the reasons for having to remain in the US between 1960-1970 was her husband's ill health. This circumstance clashed with her inner voice:

¹²¹ This would be primarily a fundamentalist-revivalist burden

¹²² Missionary 18

*I had a feeling all that time. I had had this strong motivation to go as a missionary. Because a lot of the missionaries did go back!*¹²³

As a result she developed permanent feelings of frustration:¹²⁴

I always kind of felt some resentment about it!

With hindsight she was able to appreciate the bigger picture and became aware of God's hidden blessings, which she had been unable to appreciate in her frustration at the time:

When we went back to Congo, and I saw how some of the other missionary kids struggled with going away to school, and had different kinds of problems I was so glad that we had had those ten years with our children.

After a break in the interview she volunteered the following insight, which she described as having been important to her. As had been the cases to some degree in her previous story and in that of the missionary quoted immediately before, her strong internal drive too had turned against her and her calling. In her case it eventually also affected her marriage relationship, her husband's emotional health and to some degree that of her children. The first part of this story deals with a critical phase in her missionary calling¹²⁵ as a medical doctor, during which a new young workaholic colleague became her point of reference. As had been the case in the previous case study, her competitive nature took over as the driving force behind her calling:

I guess there was some of my competitiveness, which came out which I know I have had all my life! As long as I was the only doctor I could say I can do so much and no more! But we got another doctor, and that should have made my load easier! Well what happened was this was a man who was about

¹²³ In general the men returned to Congo first. This required the women at home to be strong, while worrying about their husbands. Missionary 23 stated: 'In his letter (my husband) wrote that they had once more returned to Leopoldville (...) We praise the Lord for his protection on this trip.' (AD 6)

¹²⁴ She hints at this in the way she ends a letter to the executive secretary during her forced furlough: 'We still hope that the Lord will open the way that we can serve him again in the mission field, in Congo or elsewhere.' (AD 29)

¹²⁵ She asks herself at another point in the interview if her calling was really divine calling or if it was the result of environmental conditioning

young enough to be my son, and I had this feeling that I had to do as much work as he did. He had a wife and family, and his wife took care of running the household. But I ran the household. There wasn't a lot to do, but there were things to do, to plan the meals and to see that your cook was there and got things done, and then in the evenings, we had to make our own meals. Our cook was only there for the noon meal. And another thing is, this second doctor was a workaholic. And he used to spend a lot of time at the hospital, missing meals and that kind of thing. And I somehow got into that pattern too, because I wasn't going to be outdone!

This competition which she allowed herself to be drawn into began to seriously affect her relationships, including her marriage as well as her association with her patients:

It got to the place where my husband really got quite put out with me. And he told me one time, 'I think you love your work more than you do me!' And I told him, 'No I don't, I hate my work! Because at that point I did hate my work! I was just doing it because I felt I had to – in the meantime I wasn't enjoying it! And one day that really brought things to a head when I got angry with a patient simply because the patient was ill at an inopportune time.

She too reached a critical turning point in her calling when she had to admit her inability to cope constructively with her punishing schedule, which she realised was self-inflicted rather than being a sign of virtue:

And I thought, 'What's getting into me? Something has to change!' So my husband and I finally talked things over, and we decided I didn't have to go on my colleague's schedule. Actually I was in charge I could make my own schedule! And I was in my fifties already. He was in his thirties, which makes a difference, even though you don't want it to, but it does! So we made some rules about it that I would come home for meals unless there was an emergency and most of the time it wasn't an emergency! In the afternoon we used to do surgery and make rounds in the morning, and then have clinics in the afternoon. And that I wouldn't see more than so many patients in an afternoon.

At this crisis point she was humbled, had to overcome the accompanying 'shame' of having limitations, and had to have the courage to disappoint the expectations of an unsympathetic colleague and staff:

My colleague and the staff could never understand that! They couldn't understand that I had to make limits, but I had to do it anyway, and things went much better then.

As a result her missionary work turned from a burden into a satisfying task:

I really started to feel like I enjoyed my work again, and actually got a lot more done. Because I found you don't get a lot done when you are tired.

For her the entire episode was at its core a spiritual experience. Through it she recognised and shed the burden of her strong need to succeed. She further realised that she had instrumentalised God for her own needs, i.e., she had made God part of her burden. After the turn around she became increasingly prepared to let him set the pace instead. Through this her sense of calling was profoundly remodelled:

I found that God gives you strength if you need it for real emergencies, and that he doesn't give you strength when you just do it for your ego trip! And so that really was a spiritual experience!

As a long-term result her medical ministry broadened to include a faith-teaching ministry, which provided her with the 'most satisfaction:'

The thing that gave me the most satisfaction the last couple of years I was there was teaching a course to my nurses in French on what it means to be a Christian. Because we had a stipulation that our nurses all had to be Christians. But sometimes their idea of what it meant to be a Christian was very shallow. We'd interview people who wanted jobs, and we'd ask them what it means to be a Christian. 'O,' they would say, 'It means following the rules of the church,' or 'my parents were Mennonites, so I'm a Mennonite too,' answers like that which didn't really cut it. And so I developed this course myself. I just really felt the Lord was helping me. It was completely from the Scriptures, what the Scriptures say about sin and salvation, and how a Christian behaves, and that gave me a real sense of satisfaction! (...) And

when it was over, then I interviewed each one and asked them what the course had meant to them. And a number of them said that they had accepted Christ because of this. They had the name before, but they didn't really know what it meant. It was shortly before we came home, and it was a very, very satisfying experience for me!

Her story line illustrates that often such critical turn-arounds in the women's interpretation of their sense of call were not single but rather re-occurring events that kept on leading them into a deeper understanding both of themselves, of God and of their sense of call.

The turn around stories we have documented so far mainly concerned missionaries with a traditional sense of call, and touched primarily on their perfectionism and high achievements, which in Anabaptism/Mennonitism is supported by their optimistic regenerative anthropology. Next we will investigate how the call to discipleship and the call to follow the humble Christ, based on the Anabaptist functional anthropology, could also turn into a burden. The following story further illustrates that not only the women themselves but also their families, particularly their children, were over-extended under idealistically implemented discipleship that in this case practiced a high degree of identification and integration. Missionary 4 recounted the exceptionally high price especially one of her daughters had to pay for what she termed the family's 'over-identification' with the local population. Their extraordinary effort at integration/identification was additionally motivated by their desire to make up for mistakes of previous generations and their 'colonialist' mission approach:

The way we overreacted to the colonialists was to over-identify. We took identification with the culture so strongly that our children in the early years had to make a bigger cultural jump than was possible for them. The other two always did quite well, but the youngest one didn't. (...) And that's been our hardest experience as a family, that as a four and five year old we moved here (to the US) and back again. And both of those transitions were very painful. And when we got back she got very, very angry, a lot of negative behaviour. We didn't understand what was wrong with her. Now we are understanding that that was a major trauma, because of the culture. Just like children are traumatised maybe in abuse here (in the US) or something, she went through a trauma just from such a big cultural jump. And we didn't know enough. We didn't realise that by identifying to the degree that we did (to the local culture), we were putting our children under a lot of pressure. (...) The transitions going to Africa and one of the most traditional villages I believe.

There was no school there when we moved there. And there is almost nothing that happens in that village that a Westerner could understand without studying it. There is no aspect of life, either physical or social or the community structure that is like in the West. It's a different world and the kids had to learn all different rules, eating, and relating, and respecting. And so there's lots of things here that aren't natural for them at all.

One very significant effect this development had on the interviewee was the sense of guilt it triggered in her. This was for example expressed in her preface to the above account:

This is where I think the biggest mistake we made and my husband and I of course had to take responsibility for this!

In addition to considerations of mission praxis her extraordinarily 'radical' approach to mission life had partly been influenced by her personal maxim that if a pursuit is

not a challenge it's not worth doing.

Her mission assignment of introducing the Word of God to an 'un-reached peoples group,' then also turned at times largely into a personal quest to devise strategies with the divine dimension receding into the background:

At the start of our mission, I feel like I lapsed more into studying the Bible in a more of an intellectual way. And that would be the way my husband would study it more too. Kind of studying it to learn things.

A major crisis in her own life, and that of her entire family, however, generated a profound readjustment in her approach to her missionary call. As a first step she took personal responsibility for mistakes that were made. This, secondly, brought about a painfully changed but more realistic assessment of her optimistic view of herself and of her role in what was at its core the *missio dei*:

When there are struggles, (a person like me) will always put the blame in other places. And I have done an awful lot of that! My husband especially has taken the brunt of that. (...) And so when we struggled, I just pointed fingers and said, 'Well it all comes from you!' Today I cannot say that anymore, and that's hard but it's very, very good for me to go through that! And I will be more usable by God because of it. So I am thankful for it. But it's hard, it

really is hard! Emotionally it really brings you down, because you realise you're kind of dependent on it for some kind of security. And when that's gone – I'm not who I thought I was, it's unsettling - it's very unsettling!

A third step in her chain of responses was that she discovered new aspects of the divine caller, particularly his redeeming, caring and comforting aspects by returning to a devotional approach to faith rather than her previous predominantly rational one:

When these things started happening with our family, I had to run to God for comfort. And so then the Psalms took on a new meaning, and I just desperately needed, so the Bible became a devotional book instead of something to learn things from. And I still have an intellectual mind, and I still enjoy learning things from the Bible.

She too, like the previous two missionaries in this section of personal case studies, experienced a shift from a position of personal strength to one of personal weakness. In addition she developed, during the subsequent furlough, a renewed focus on the healing, regenerating aspects of the divine caller and of a supportive Christian fellowship group:

When I first came back (on furlough), I was just so burned out and down, and I'd go to (my) prayer group, and I think the first month I cried through all the singing every time. And some of these people didn't hardly even know me! And I couldn't say anything. I just cried and cried. And that really kind of got me out of depression. (..) Everything that was stored up in there. And the promises of God were just so overwhelming! Some of it was grief, but some of it was that renewal of God's presence. That group has a lot of healing songs. That was definite praying to God for healing. And I knew music was important! We've done a lot of music as a family. We're all good singers. And so that's always been important. But leading your children in singing is different than sitting in a prayer group and singing!

All these stories show that for a calling to be sustained in the long term, it needs to be continually re-modelled. Although most missionaries had undergone a conversion experience in their youth, at the basis of their re-modelling processes was renewed repentance, a prominent early Anabaptist concept. In this process the missionaries (and not the Africans) were converted: They changed, through an ongoing process, their view of themselves, of the divine caller.

CONCLUSION

The Call, the Self, and the Caller

Cultural Re-location

The Journey There and Back 'Home'

I originally set out to investigate from a pastoral perspective how Mennonite women missionaries understood their calling, how it was related to Anabaptist/Mennonite theological and mission-historical distinctives, and to what extent it was a support factor in their journey to the mission field and back 'home.'¹ In order to find the answers I listened to the women's stories as recorded orally and in archival form, and to the way they were told. At times the oral and the archival material seemed to provide two different accounts, largely because they were aimed at two distinct audiences. One was the official mission community in the form of the mission administration and the recipients of circular news letters, and the other was a 'sympathetic' interviewer researching the pastoral aspects of life on the mission field. Consequently one set of records tells the official story and the other a more intimate one. This means that they have to be 'heard' differently and on a different level. In the official correspondence the women seldom revealed their more private emotions. The stories were also different however, because the archival material often reflected the missionaries' thoughts in anticipation of their service abroad, while the interviews were mostly granted retrospectively and often at a time when the women were already out of the 'system,' and felt they could be more open. The interviewees also had the added advantage of having had time to reflect on their faith journey, on their initial sense of call, and on their mission experiences.

The first part of the research question, how the women understood their calling and how this relates to the Anabaptist/Mennonite theological and mission-historical distinctives, is informed by critical variables. A significant aspect of the missionaries' understanding of the divine call is encapsulated in the distinctive Anabaptist/Mennonite call to discipleship and the call to be in the world but not of it. This understanding of the divine call had significantly shaped their socio-religious profile from an early age, although not every missionary experienced this in the same way. The differences in experience are largely due to the theological environment and to the historical era in which they grew up. A majority of women was raised in Mennonite communities with a strong fundamentalist-revivalist overlay, a minority in a 'traditional' Mennonite environment that had been influenced by the 'Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision,' an internal movement that sought to reintroduce the original Anabaptist distinctives into Mennonite communities that had lost some important aspects of their theological heritage.

¹ I put the word home in quotation marks, because on their return to North America most missionaries initially felt like strangers in their former home environment.

In spite of these theological differences missionaries raised in both traditions were strongly influenced by the call to discipleship and the call to be in the world but not of it, among others through their religio-cultural values. Based on the call to discipleship these included a strong sense that the Christian life had to be lived out in practical daily commitment. This form of discipleship was costly, and could include suffering for the sake of the call. High on its agenda was a distinct service mentality, which expressed itself *i.a.* through hospitality, selflessly reaching out to the less fortunate, etc. This spirit of service was particularly encouraged in women. Many missionaries also vividly remembered childhood stories of forebears who migrated in the tradition of the Abrahamic call, forsaking the securities of a stable existence because of their loyalty to Christ. Those growing up in a traditional Anabaptist/Mennonite environment directly connected these values with Christ's call 'follow me.' They usually felt that they had grown into faith without the distinct personal conversion experience which was the norm for their counterparts who had been influenced by the fundamentalist-revivalist movement. They also viewed service and living a Christ-like life as witnessing to one's faith, while those from a revival background practiced a more overt and open evangelism.

The missionaries' early spiritual profile was further shaped by the call to be in the world but not of it. They grew up with related religio-cultural values that had an ascetic perfectionist slant such as simple living, producing work of a high standard, learning to cope independently, and a strong sense of responsibility. In addition the call to be in the world but not of it had come to mean living an exile community life that largely centred on the church with a strong sense of the importance of public and private worship practices.

Theologically the call to discipleship and the call to be in the world but not of it are underpinned by distinctive Anabaptist hermeneutic principles and theological perspectives. The hermeneutic principles are mainly expressed in the tension between the inner and the outer, the spirit and the law. In its historic development the trend shifted in favour of the law. This tendency is re-emphasised by the Anabaptist near-literal reading of scripture with the Sermon on the Mount as the canon within the Canon. The theological distinctives that underpin the call to discipleship are their functional Christology and anthropology which have at their core the medieval/mendicant concept of Christ the king as the lamb, symbol of sacrificial service. The disciple follows Christ's call by obeying the king through following the lamb. The theological distinctives underpinning the call to be in the world but not of it are an ontological Christology and optimistic regenerative anthropology which, based on strong emphasis on Christ's divine nature, set high standards for the Christian walk of the disciple. These high standards are further entrenched by the traditional Anabaptist two-step soteriology which stipulates that the disciple's spiritual re-birth has to be authenticated by the fruit they produce in their lives. In addition the Anabaptists traditionally interpret the sacraments symbolically replacing the focus

on merciful redemptive divine intervention by grace, with an emphasis on the worthiness and commitment of those who partake in the symbol.

As indicated earlier, the women's understanding of the call was not only shaped by their Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage which was lived out in various forms and degrees in their early environment, but also by the era in which they were raised and served as missionaries. Large parts of the Mennonite community had been affected by the 19th century mission revival of the Western Protestant churches. This understanding of missions was in its nature Protestant/revivalist and not Anabaptist/Mennonite. It was also at the roots of the founding of the *CIM/AIMM* mission organisation at the beginning of the 20th century. It was characterised by a strong *Sendungsbewusstsein* and had at its core a burden for the lost. Further, it included from its inception practical action, particularly in the area of education and health care. This interpretation of the call opened up extraordinary opportunities for ministry to women, which normally were closed to them in their home churches. At least in theory women missionaries were recruited on the same terms as their male counterparts. This is illustrated by the fact that according to the application forms they too were expected to have a personal sense of call. They joined mission service for the same reasons as did the men, namely to evangelise and win souls for Christ. This they intended to do largely by practicing their profession.

While the mission spirit of *CIM/AIMM* was inspired by Protestant revivalist theology it was the impression of the missionaries that based on their Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage they differed from missionaries of other denominations in their mission praxis. They felt they were extra motivated to learn the local language, and to engage with the African people on a more equal level in general. Over time this servant attitude played an increasingly important part in the understanding of the missionary call in Protestant missions as a whole, but especially also among Mennonites. For them this development was additionally underpinned by the interpretation of Christ's call to discipleship on which the Return to the Anabaptist Vision movement had put a renewed focus. The new interpretation of the sense of call opened up the withdrawn Mennonite community to the African culture with which they identified because of such common values as simple living, and the importance of relationships. It had the added effect that those who felt called were less bound by geography than those with a more traditional (fundamentalist-revivalist) sense of call had been, because discipleship can be practised anywhere.

The Sense of Call Revisited

Once they were confronted with the realities on the mission field, the women found many of their original expectations severely challenged. Married women especially felt a burden of having to choose between either compromising what they saw as their calling, or compromising their roles as wives and especially as mothers. The single missionaries who had to face the

mission challenges on their own found that they were often dealt with by the mission administration on the assumption that they were more flexible than their married counterparts. In addition both married and unmarried women missionaries usually had to practice their professions under exceptionally taxing and frustrating circumstances. These included a constant awareness that they could not meet the great needs they encountered, their relative lack of experience in their field of work, etc., and in spite of their best efforts the results of their work were often disappointing. In addition they were confronted with language challenges, health issues, and rudimentary living conditions. What sometimes might have seemed heroic or romantic from the home perspective turned out to be intensely challenging realities on the mission field. The older generation had to live under this kind of pressure for an uninterrupted four years at least before they embarked on their first furlough. In many respects the missionaries responded to these challenges with the socio-religious coping mechanisms they had absorbed in their home culture. These were based on a strong sense of commitment and on the maxim of giving much and asking for little. As a result of the unexpectedly demanding conditions on the mission field and their particular way of responding to them a great number of women suffered severe emotional trauma and exhaustion to the extent that at one point they accepted nervous break downs during their fourth year of service as the norm.

The generational shift that occurred in the women's understanding of their missionary call over time, which replaced their early *Sendungsbewusstsein* with an emphasis on servanthood, integration and identification with the mission churches, and a greater appreciation of the culture of the mission country, placed a different high demand on the human factor in the mission endeavour. Overall the missionaries again responded according to their early socio-religious conditioning with commitment, at high cost to themselves. This too placed a heavy burden on the women, so heavy in fact that in many cases it turned out to be too taxing for either the missionaries themselves or for their families, particularly their children.

Burden or Blessing?

It was my original position that a sense of a divine call would act as a support factor for women in their cultural re-location experience. Through my investigation I have come to the conclusion that this original hypothesis is only partly true. It was almost always true for the initial re-location phase both to Africa and back 'home,' where the sense of call acted as a strong motivational factor to deal with the challenges of the new situation. In the long-term the sense of call was in many cases both a burden and a blessing. It acted as a support factor insofar as it gave the missionaries a sense of assurance that they were where they were supposed to be, and generally doing what they were supposed to do. This knowledge

supported them in difficult times, helping them to 'super-centre'² on the caller as a crucial extra reference point in their mission situation. However, the sense of call also often turned against those who felt called. This is evident among others from the fact that so many of them, including some of their children suffered severe emotional trauma during their time of service. The destructive aspects of the sense of call were usually connected to the fact that the women approached their missionary call with certain unrealistic views of the divine caller, of themselves and their mandate. Such unrealistic views were, particularly in the long term severely challenged by the realities of mission service. This usually led the women into crises. In the process they had to re-adjust critical parts of their sense of call, they, not just the Africans they served, had to be converted. This required some fundamental changes (traditionally understood as repentance), and the remodelling of their sense of call in order to survive as individuals and as missionaries. This re-adjustment usually did not come about through one single event only, but rather through a process that repeated itself in various forms, to differing degrees and at different points of their missionary journey. Occasionally it even happened that those who seemingly sailed through their initial re-location and through their long-term experience suddenly were confronted with such a crisis right at the end of their missionary journey as they had to re-locate back 'home.'

In Anticipation and in Retrospect

The Divine Caller

There were significant commonalities in how the women had perceived God, the divine caller in their youth. Among the most common concepts were the God who is 'not to be trifled with,' the divine taskmaster, and, based on how they experienced their fathers, a God who was protective and benevolent but remote. This remoteness was underpinned by the Anabaptist/Mennonite ontological Christology, which particularly emphasised Christ's divinity, and by their functional Christology, which tended to set unattainable goals for the disciple. These concepts of the divine caller were further related to the fundamentalist-revivalist tradition.

The women's view of the caller expanded over time, although some of the early concepts, such as the holy God, or the God who punishes and rewards, and who demanded much, often remained in place. By the time the women filled in their application forms for missions many, especially of the older generation, had a dichotomous view of God. On the one hand they displayed great trust in God their friend who would provide for them in even the most challenging mission situations. On the other hand they retained their concept of the remote holy God in their doctrinal statements.

² Cf. Paul Tournier in the Introduction

In the course of their missionary service, and often triggered by personal crises, many had their view of God significantly enlarged. The God who for many had originally been mainly a motivational force in their sense of call, who demanded and deserved their full commitment, obedience and sacrifice, and who had in some cases turned into an object of intellectual study, often became the God who resurrects and sustains frail humans as themselves, who had exhausted themselves in their efforts to obey his call.

On the mission field their view of Christ came more into focus than it had been under the comparatively less stressful situation at home. At times women fitted him into their overall demanding understanding of their divine call. This sometimes resulted in their committing themselves to more than they could handle, believing that God would give them the necessary strength to deal with the excessive demands. This was the case both for the traditional as well as for the new generation missionaries. The women had to find out that they had to change this view of the caller, because against their expectations they did not receive the strength needed for their unreasonable demands on themselves. As a result they had to admit defeat in their unrealistic view of the demanding caller and come to know him not only as saviour and role model but also as the comforting and healing redeemer, who was there for those who had failed.

In their youth they had mainly referred to Christ's role as saviour in connection with their conversion experience, at which point he had forgiven their general sinfulness, and which for them often had a connotation of fear, the fear of hell and eternal condemnation. In contrast their 'conversion experiences' on the mission field were often characterised by an acute insight into the inadequacy and frailty of their human condition based on concrete situations, and the fear factor was replaced by a renewed holy respect for God but also by a very real experience of his forgiveness, mercy and love in Christ.

For their sense of call to be a true support factor the women had to realise that the mission endeavour did not depend on their superhuman efforts, and that no matter how hard they worked they were unable to effect the divine changes on the mission field they longed for. Instead they had to learn to step back from any over-committedness, and assign to the Holy Spirit the role of the true missionary as many had done in theory in the doctrinal part of their application forms.

The Self

For the women their mission journey was only a part, although an important one, of their overall life's journey. They were children of their times, born into certain socio-religious circumstances which significantly shaped their identity. Based on their Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage they grew up as God-fearing, capable, conscientious and self-giving individuals with a rich spiritual life, and who had been taught to live by high standards. As mostly rural women they were not

spoilt by an easy life, having been taught to make the best of all circumstances. Before entering missionary service many were involved in leadership roles in Christian activities such as Sunday school, mission prayer circles, vacation Bible schools, etc. They were good organisers, used to hard work, able to make something out of very little, good cooks; all qualities they had generally learnt from their mothers. They usually had a solid but not an exceptional education, which could include tertiary studies at a Bible college. Most of them had learnt a traditional female profession, such as nursing or teaching. At the same time they were devoted family women. Most, although they were capable in themselves, led traditional marriages and viewed their husbands as the head of their relationship. At the same time some major decisions, such as the question of entering missionary service for example, were made jointly by many couples. Only a few women felt that in this regard they needed to submit to their husbands on the basis of the biblical Ruth's motto 'where you go I will go.' Some women commented on the positive synergy between themselves and their husbands in building up mission ministries, and how once they returned home they realised that this had largely been the glue that had kept them together. Besides the many commonalities it has to be kept in mind though, that the women were more than the mere product of their environment. Each one of them was an individual on her own personal life journey.

Even under difficult mission circumstances most of them succeeded in building up strong ministries of their own in teaching, health care, women's work, translation work, accounting, devising leadership and mission strategies. At the same time many women learned with much pain that they were not who they had thought they were. As they confronted their human limits and frailty, concepts that are not highly developed either in Mennonite theology, or in the revivalist-fundamentalist tradition, they were forced to reassess their view of themselves as being limitlessly capable, self-sufficient, and able to give. In the process they had to learn to entrust themselves to divine resurrection.

The call as a Support Factor

In listening to the women's stories it became clear that in order to prove or disprove my original hypothesis that a clear sense of call was likely to act as a significant support factor in their cultural re-location experience their cultural re-location has to be divided into three main phases. These are the initial phase, the long-term phase, and finally their return 'home.' The women had to negotiate each phase separately, yet at the same time they were all related and in the end formed one meta-narrative.

If the women succeeded in constructively negotiating all three phases their individual stories, including their suffering, disappointments and failures, were overarched by a positive meta-narrative. That does not mean that those who relocated successfully did not speak, often emotionally, about their difficult and painful experiences, which included significant

initial challenges in making the transition from one culture to another. These entailed language learning, coping with very different and often difficult practical living conditions, an unaccustomed climate, having to re-build a support system. In the long term they often also included a lack of role definition, role overload, illness, loneliness, seeing their children suffer severely under the strain of mission life, feelings of guilt, depression, and nervous break downs. However, those who successfully negotiated all three phases of their cultural re-location did not make these events the main focus of their stories. Even if one takes into consideration that retrospectively they might have 'sanitised' their memories to some degree it is evident that after having described them they moved on to the positive aspects of their overall experience. These positive points they often described with great enthusiasm, dwelling on them, describing them in terms of having 'loved it,' having 'enjoyed it,' having got 'great joy and satisfaction' out of it. Additional signs that someone had re-located successfully included them having acquired at least one local language and having developed successful relationships with the local population.

Their stories further revealed that those who did not succeed in their initial re-location to Africa also did not succeed in their long term re-location. They were usually hesitant to speak about their entire experience, often giving very short monotone answers, and seemingly preferring to stay away from the topic all together. It is usually more difficult to gauge from the official documents only if the missionaries had actually re-located successfully or not. However, the principle of the meta-narrative applies there too.

Next we have to ask ourselves the question, did the women have a personal sense of call, and how did the presence or absence of a personal sense of call affect the women's ability to culturally re-locate? Their stories indicate that as far as having a personal sense of call, the women fell into three main categories. Firstly there were those with a clear personal sense of call. This included all the single missionaries. Secondly there were those who lacked a clear personal sense of call, but substituted their lack of call by integrating themselves into their husbands' sense of call, and thirdly there were those who followed their husbands into missions against strong persisting internal resistance.

Of the great majority of those women who touched on the subject, those with a clear sense of call negotiated their initial re-location successfully.³ The case study does however document the experience of one single woman with a very strong sense of call that was confirmed by her spiritual elders, who against everybody's expectation did not succeed in re-locating successfully. Those who adopted their husband's sense of call by proxy succeeded

³ One of the limitations of this study is that except for one case it does not include missionaries who were unsuccessful in negotiating their initial relocation phase. It however quotes observations by senior missionaries that indicate that not everyone who had a clear sense of call survived the initial stage.

in their initial re-location, if more slowly and less enthusiastically than those with a personal sense of call. Those without a personal sense of call who followed their husbands against strong internal resistance survived their initial re-location but never really re-located internally. This is *i.a.* evident from the way in which they were perceptibly more reluctant to speak about the topic in a personal way, and from the far more negative focus of their meta-narrative. On the mission field their inability to re-locate successfully could manifest itself for example in a failure to acquire the local language, which in turn kept them from successful relationships with the local population. Usually they also failed to find a truly satisfying niche for themselves in the mission endeavour.

What I did not anticipate as I embarked on my research is that the same mechanism also came into play on the women's return journey 'home.' Those who returned 'home' for the sake of their families, or because of political unrest in their mission country, for example, found it considerably more difficult to re-integrate into their home culture and find a place for themselves than those who returned with their internal consent. In many cases their eventual successful re-integration entailed a marked process of individualisation especially from their husbands.

The Call as Law or Grace

Reflecting back on what I have sought to do in this thesis which, in many respects has become a personal journey in itself, I am left with one major impression. It finds its origin in my original reading of Kingsolver's powerful work *Poisonwood Bible*, for what precisely was it that bothered me in that text? Was it the obvious caricature of the husband missionary, the harshness, even cruelty of the portrait painted? Or was it the phenomenon of a missionary wife who was forced to sink or swim without any sense at all of being called even by proxy, for what missionary society would really sponsor this? Perhaps both of these bothered me equally. But, above all, it was that amidst the inevitable exaggerations of the text, necessary to achieve its objectives, there was such a powerful expose of the problem of the missionary call gone wrong, the damage it did to husband, wife and family, and to the African community where they lived and worked. In essence what went wrong, I would suggest, was a failure to understand the call in terms of grace and love rather than commandment, law, and human effort. There was nothing graceful about the husband's call, nothing that helped to redeem the situation in which both he and his wife found themselves. In fact, the call turned against the one who felt called and in turn against his family.

What Kingsolver describes is remote from what I discovered in my research. This is just not how the missionaries, husbands and wives, really experienced the call or expressed their vocation. It is, as I have suggested, a caricature. Yet in that caricature lies the germ of an important truth that does, in fact, resonate with what I have discovered in the course of my

research. That is the danger that the missionary call, which can be such a source of strength, can also become a burden. And, to take this one step further, the problem lies precisely where it does in the *Poisonwood Bible*, namely, when the call begins to take on the character of obligation and loses its quality as grace. This danger is not more problematic for Mennonite missionaries than it is for Protestants, but it is perhaps more likely to become one given the factors that I have described and explored. Could this be a reminder of one of the dividing lines that separated the magisterial Reformers (Luther, Zwingli and Calvin) from the Anabaptists, namely, the relationship of law and grace? Theologically-speaking I believe that this is the case, and that my thesis points in this direction. A lack of a sense of call, either as a specific sense of call to mission, or as a more general sense of call to discipleship and to live counter-culturally as citizens of the kingdom of God, posed a severe hurdle for women in their cultural re-location. A sense of call *per se* did not guarantee a successful re-location experience either. It only acted as a support factor if it was primarily understood as grace and not as works.

AN ADDENDUM ON METHODOLOGY

In the Introduction I provided a brief account of the methodological approach adopted in this thesis. This was described as both theological-historical and mission-historical. In the second part of the thesis I also adopted an approach which I there labelled socio-religious profiling, in order to describe the women missionaries' understanding of the divine call. Methodology at the best of times is fraught with difficulties, and these increase when the approach to research is multi-disciplinary in character, but also multi-layered as I shall indicate. The more I engaged in my research, the more this became evident. For this reason I would like to reflect on what I have done and expand more on the methodology/ies that were operative.

Any research needs to be thoroughly grounded in a particular discipline even when it is multi-disciplinary in character. The dominant approach adopted in my thesis is theological, and it is theological method that has determined the way in which I have proceeded. However, that in itself begs several questions for theological methodology is also varied in character. My approach has been to examine the way in which certain key Anabaptist-Mennonite theological distinctives have developed and been understood within their original historical contexts, and how these distinctives have also mutated over time.

The three theological background chapters therefore deal with Anabaptist/Mennonite theology in its historical context. They firstly investigate the concepts of the call to discipleship, the call to be in the world but not of it, and the call for women to follow during the early pneumatic phase in Anabaptism. Secondly they describe some important historical mutations of the concepts, in the form of a significant calcification, which took place during the consolidation period from the end of the 16th century to approximately the middle of latter half of the 19th century. The third major shift in the meaning of the concepts is documented in the second part of the thesis by the testimonies of the missionaries themselves. They include for a majority the incorporation into their theology of fundamentalist-revivalist North American theology. The same chapters further trace through the witness of the missionaries the response in some Mennonite circles to these foreign theological influences by attempting a 'Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision.'

The major focus in the thesis is, however, on Mennonite missions and especially the notion of being divinely called to do mission work. For this reason the theological distinctives chosen for examinations have been those that are missiologically appropriate, or else distinctives that have been approached from that perspective. By way of example, Anabaptist Christology was approached not just as a subject in its own right, but as one that informs the women missionaries interpretation of their call to mission. But I have done this also within an historical framework, giving special consideration to alien theological and

missiological influences. This mission-historical approach is therefore integrated into the theological-historical methodological framework, but is controlled by the latter.

The third methodological step follows closely on these two previous approaches and is informed by them. This I have called socio-religious profiling. Amongst recent studies that deal with this phenomenon is Anthony Gittins' work entitled *Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Mission*.¹ Gittins' main objective in developing his strategy is to enable missionaries to successfully understand their vocation rather than to provide a methodology for a research project such as I have undertaken. Nonetheless, his approach is worth noting not least because it corresponds to what I discerned in the course of my research, even though not all of his categories are of equal relevance.

In dealing with the missionary call Gittins points out that the theological understanding of the call is often amalgamated with cultural baggage, which I, from my perspective as a researcher, refer to as the sociological aspects of the sense of call. What is it that informs mission behaviour and engagement is the underlying question Gittins is asking, and similarly the question that informs my own enquiry. Of particular interest is his reference to a romantic interpretation of the call, a phenomenon which was raised repeatedly by the interviewees as indicated in the empirical section (Part Two) of my thesis. Another form of cultural baggage Gittins' discusses is a pessimistic interpretation of the call which causes the recipient to jump to the conclusion that nothing will work out for the best. As a result the individual distrusts the cultural environment and therefore cuts herself off from any deeper engagement in the mission context.

As an alternative approach to a missionary's understanding of the call, Gittins proposes participant/observation. In many respects this is what my research both bears out and in fact encouraged the women interviewed to engage in. Although Gittins has in mind that this approach should be adopted by the missionaries from the time of their first sense of call and throughout their period as missionaries, and also speaks of its value on their return "home," my use of this approach has primarily been retrospective. That is, through the interviews, I have encouraged the women missionaries as participants in mission work to reflect back on their experience. This has then informed my analysis. As is evident in Part Two, such reflection can be painful and intellectually demanding even in, and perhaps more so, in retrospect, but it also has a cathartic function which enables those involved to better understand and come to terms with their experience in a way that leads to a more wholesome closure.

My approach was, however, not just in terms of cultural baggage but also of religious baggage which either functioned as a burden, or was potentially so. But not all religious commitments functioned in this way, they could also act as a means of grace and blessing,

¹¹ GITTINS, Anthony J.: *Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003

and therefore as a support factor. The truth is, it is very difficult to separate religious commitments and understanding from their cultural heritage and sociological embeddedness.

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18.06.02

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June 19, 2002

Missionary 3
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Missionary 4 (1)
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Missionary 23

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AD 4

Missionary 23

Prayer Card (2)

AD 5

Letter from

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AD 6

Missionary 23 Missionary

Letter from

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AD 7

Missionary 24

Application for Missionary Service

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AD 8

Missionary 25 Missionary

Letter from

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AD 9

Missionary 26

Candidate's Blank A

Undated, by implication ca. 1947/8

AD 10

Missionary 27 Missionary

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AD 11

Missionary 27

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AD 12

Missionary 28
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AD 13
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AD 14
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AD 16
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AD 17
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AD 19
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AD 20
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AD 21
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Congo, Feb. 7, 1966

AD 23
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Letter from

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Letter from
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Letter from
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AD 26

Letter from
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'It Would Have Thrilled any Missionary on Furlough'
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Missionary 35
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Undated, by deduction: ca. 1940

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Missionary 38
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Missionary 5 and husband
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Missionary 5 and husband
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AD 43
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AD 44
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March 2, 1959

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Missionary 20
Personnel Record Form for missionary candidates
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Letter from
Nov. 27, 1969

AD 47
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Oct. 26, 1984

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AD 49
The Board of Missions
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AD 50
The Board of Missions, Newton Kansas
To Missionary 40
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The Board of Missions
To: Missionary 19 and husband
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AD 57
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University of Cape Town